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# Professors on Film: Is Perception Reality? Study of American Comedic Film Treatment of University Faculty From 1925 to 1951

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PROFESSORS ON FILM: IS PERCEPTION REALITY?

*Study of American Comedic Film Treatment of University Faculty  
From 1925 to 1951*

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Seton Hall University

2009

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## ABSTRACT

The American media -- films, television, books, magazines, music, plays -- have an enormous impact on our culture, perceptions and ideas. With the exception of film, considerable research has been conducted on all of these media and their depiction of the university professor and/or education in that particular medium. There does not appear to have been any research into how the professor is depicted in American comedic movies in the time frame of 1925 to 1951, which is the subject of this research. Because American movies are so powerful and their access so universal, their influence is timeless. Today's influences can easily be yesterday's films because all that is necessary is that the film be viewed today. Due to the fact that every major and minor 20<sup>th</sup> century comedian and comedienne has made a college film in this time period, these films are still viewed with regularity. Since this outreach is so pervasive this research proposes to study the American comedic films in the 1925-1951 time periods and to analyze the depiction of the professor. Exactly how is the professor depicted in these films? What image is the Hollywood professor projecting? What historical higher education events might explain these depictions in any particular time period? This researcher believes that gaining a fuller understanding of these depictions will have significant import to faculty, administrators, and students in American universities. The author of this study also believes that this research will add to the existing scholarship on media portrayals of professors in higher education to provide a greater understanding of American higher education as a whole and the professor in particular.

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*“The world is a comedy to those that think, a tragedy to those that feel.”*

----- Horace Walpole (Walpole, in Manchel, 1973, p. 3)



## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family: my wife Sharon, daughters Samantha and Kelly and sons Craig and Dean. They are my life and inspiration.

## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background of the Research Problem

Of all of the visual cultural endeavors we are exposed to as a society, the American cinema has a most profound impact upon our senses and perceptions. Perhaps more than any other art form, the cinema can both mirror our current attitudes and beliefs and at the same time, shape those same attitudes and beliefs. American film has the power to be both and do both with the duality of intended and unintended motives (Hinton, 1994, p.5).

Are the American film experience and its associated influences restricted to Americans? Apparently that is not the case because American cinema dominates the world. In fact, the vast majority of the most popular films (as judged by attendance) each year world-wide are American films (Buchsbaum, 1995, p.1) While it may be difficult to assess exactly how expansive the Hollywood influence may be, we can certainly illustrate the point with keen examples of a pervading influence. No one would argue the impact of Hollywood on fashion and culture. We can all recall examples of movies that have affected dress, hairstyles, verbal expressions and the like (Miller, 1980). Whether it be Clint Eastwood's "Go ahead, make my day" (*Sudden Impact*, Eastwood, 1983), Marlon Brando's "I'll make him an offer he can't refuse" (*The Godfather*, Ruddy, 1972), or a sudden rush to purchase a particular sunglass after watching *Risky Business* (Geffen Company, 1983), we have all witnessed comparatively superficial examples of Hollywood's influence. However, that influence can and does run deeper.

Wilcomb Washburn (as cited in O'Connor & Rollins, 1998) of the Smithsonian Institution stated flatly that "the image of the American Indian, more than any other ethnic group, has been shaped by films" (O'Connor & Rollins, 1998, p. IX). Woll (as cited in Miller, 1980) discussed governmental influence from Hollywood. In 1919, the Mexican government was fed up with world-wide ridicule stemming from Hollywood's depiction of the Mexican as an undesirable character. They wrote a letter to the Hollywood film producers complaining of this portrayal and hinted that they would halt production if it continued. By 1922, the Mexican government did ban all films that continued this unflattering portrayal. According to one government official at the time, "Ill will toward Mexico has been inflamed by these pictures to such an extent that the Mexican government found it necessary to make such a protest" (Miller, 1980, pp. 56-57). Similarly, harsh reactions from Latin American nations to stereotypical portrayals led Hollywood to establish the International Information Center in Los Angeles. The goal of this organization was to have Latino experts review scripts prior to shooting to eliminate offensive portrayals (Miller, 1980).

In September of 2005, a member of the board of the diamond giant, De Beers, gave a speech in Cape Town, South Africa. The subject of the speech by Jonathon Oppenheimer (as cited in Vary, 2006) to the global mining conference was a grave warning to the entire diamond industry. What was the concern? The concern was about a movie entitled *Blood Diamond* (Zwick, 2006) that had not even begun shooting yet. The subject of the movie is how the Sierra Leone civil war was financed by uncut diamonds. Oppenheimer implored his audience "Can you imagine its impact on the Christmas-buying audience in America" (p.7)? The concern about the impact of this movie on their

industry has prompted representatives of the diamond industry to contact the film's director and ask him to alter the film's content. Failing at that, they have instituted a public relations campaign including websites and print literature delivered to jewelers to try and get their message out prior to the film's release. This is so illustrative of the power of the Hollywood film. An entire global industry is worried about the backlash from a single movie (Vary, 2006). This very power and influence of film is what forms the theoretical perspective of this study: How the professor has been depicted in these films will most assuredly have a lasting impression due to the power, influence, access and durability of cinema.

#### PERCEPTION AS REALITY

The portrayals of characters in film have a significant impact on the public perception of those very same characters. In a world that is somewhat cloistered from public view, such as the American university, this perception has the potential to become a reality for some observers. This reality can then lead to a serious influence on the American university and its faculty if the perception is incorporated into policy formation and such policy is acted upon. There can even be significant influence upon both students and prospective students. If students have viewed film regarding collegiate life, they may enter their college experience with preconceived notions and values that may or may not be accurate. They may even interact with their professors appropriately or inappropriately based upon the information that they have gleaned from American cinema. "How movies portray students, professors, and administrators relates directly to higher education's status in society" (Hinton, 1994, p.64).

(Griffith & Mayer, 1970) and Keaton returned to the college genre with a role as a professor in *Speak Easily* (MGM, 1932) (Dardis, 1980; Kline, 1993). In addition, Chaplin's only foray into the role of the professor was an aborted film entitled *The Professor* (Chaplin, 1919). This short film shows Chaplin's character bearing the films title and portraying a flea circus operator. It is shown to the public for the first time in these compilations. We also find out that this aborted film was reincarnated by Chaplin in one of his later masterpieces, *Limelight* (Chaplin, 1952). Each compilation includes DVD upon DVD of additional material other than the original film work of the stars which only adds additional emphasis to their original work and its influences.

Additionally, Hollywood has a penchant for re-making films. This has never been more evident than in the rash of re-makes in recent years. Films like *Superman Returns* (Singer, 2006) *Lady-killers* (Coen, 2004), *Herbie Fully Loaded* (Disney, 2005), *King Kong* (Universal, 2005), *Batman Begins* (Nolan, 2005), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (Burton, 2005), and *The Bad News Bears* (Linklater, 2005) among others have all been re-made in the past six years. This leaves open the possibility that films depicting professors (like *Lady-killers* which is a foreign film made originally in 1955 and re-made in 2004 or *The Absent Minded Professor* (Walsh, 1961)( discussed later) will also be re-made and that will only increase their influence amongst the movie going public.

### SANS PROFESSOR

The collegiate life depicted in film generally, and the portrayal of the professor specifically, have had little, if any analysis to date. Studies have been completed about the American college treatment in fiction, such as Thelin and Townsend (1988), Bowman (1977), Carpenter (1960), and Boys (1946). Another study was completed about the

depiction of education in popular song lyrics (Butchart & Cooper, 1987). However, it seems that there have not been any studies done specifically about the professor's portrayal in American cinema. To date, only a few books and doctoral dissertations that address any aspect of collegiate life as depicted in American film have been written. To make matters worse, three of the dissertations are only available at the universities of origin. The three dissertations are: *The portrayal of education in American motion pictures, 1931 – 1961*, (Schwartz, 1963); *The College milieu in the American fiction film with emphasis on the work of Mike Nichols: a study in belief systems* (Schuth, 1972); and *Celluloid ivy: Higher education in the movies 1960 – 1990* (Hinton, 1991). However, two of the dissertations are discussed at length by Hinton (1994) and the third, by Hinton, was turned into a book. None of these studies are aimed specifically at the professor and as a result, virtually none of the research analyzes the role of the professor in American film in any time period. This is an area of research that is decidedly lacking in both breadth and depth.

#### RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE STUDY

This researcher will examine the content of American comedic films that were produced in the period 1925 through 1951 and portrayed professors in some aspect. This particular time period produced films from a surprisingly high percentage of major comedic entertainers (see Appendix A) of the twentieth century. In fact, every major comedian - both male and female - of the twentieth century made at least one film based on a collegiate theme. For example, of the 36 films made by Bud Abbott and Lou Costello a full five were made with either a college theme or included a role of a professor (Costello, 1981; Cox & Lofflin, 1997). A tremendous amount of second tier

comedians also made these collegiate themed films. In addition, a great many actors like Cary Grant, James Stewart and Clark Gable made collegiate themed films of a comedic nature. Since these films involve so many major comedians and actors, and since these films are so readily available in both VCR and DVD formats, they continue to be watched, analyzed, and thus, influence the audiences of today.

Stars of this magnitude still hold a significant influence on the viewers of today. Just in the very recent past, Abbott and Costello have been the recipients of several honors. They were inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame on November 5, 2005 and their home towns have also sponsored honors. Patterson, New Jersey recently celebrated Lou Costello's one hundredth birthday with a weekend long party and Asbury Park, New Jersey honored Bud Abbott with a Lifetime Achievement Award at the opening of the Garden State Film Festival on March 31, 2006 (Palumbo, 2006). Both topics have received extensive coverage in the *Newark Star-Ledger* newspaper.

Abbott and Costello were even chosen to be characters on an instant lottery ticket by the New Jersey State Lottery Commission. Along with Abbott and Costello in 2005, the commission has also recently used the likeness and names of Laurel and Hardy in 2006 and Marilyn Monroe in 2008 on other instant lottery tickets. The second chance drawings for all of these instant lotteries include significant amounts of merchandise bearing the likeness of the specific Hollywood personality that is on the ticket.

Even the United States Post Service (USPS) has honored the likeness of Hollywood luminaries with countless stamps in their honor. A few years ago the USPS issued a special comedian stamp collection that honored Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy, Buster Keaton, W.C. Fields and Charlie Chaplin among others. These comedians

are all a part of this research and obviously continue to exert an influence today. In fact, according to Munn (2003), the Hollywood star that continues to sell more home videos and DVD's than anyone else, living or dead, is John Wayne. How can it be that John Wayne died in 1979 but he still leads in home video sales? It is simply further proof of the timeless nature of both film accessibility and more importantly for this study, the perennial influence that they can create from their viewings. The prominent names of Hollywood's past seem to continuously create a new following of fans. As a result, the films that they created in years past are still being enjoyed today, as is their message and the images portrayed.

The power, influence, access and durability of American cinema is extensive, pervasive and has a lasting impact on the viewer to the extent that it has created a public perception problem for the professor. Therefore, the purpose for the study is to evaluate the portrayal of the professor in American cinema comedies during the period 1925 to 1951. This time period is significant on several levels. First, it includes the silent film era and the prominent college films *The Freshman* (Lloyd, 1925) and *College* (Schenck, 1927) as previously mentioned. Secondly, as a backdrop, this time period includes the movement in the US from an elite university system to one of mass attendance. During this critical time period the college enrollment in the United States increased many times over from 250,000 students during World War I to 1.3 million by the start of World War II. By 1949 -1950 that enrollment had blossomed up to 2.7 million students primarily as a result of the GI Bill's inducement for education for the returning servicemen and women (Altbach et al, 2001; Thelin, 2004). These staggering enrollment increases brought about significant changes to the American campus that were chronicled by Trow (1973). Lastly,



### The Research Question

In what manner are college professors portrayed in American film comedies during the period 1925 through 1951 and is there any aspect of the history of higher education in America that is the basis for that depiction?

### Subsidiary Questions

1. What institutional traits are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?
2. What personal traits of the professor are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?
3. What professional traits of the professor are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?
4. What film traits are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?

### Definition of Terms

Conceptual framework: Refers to the theory and the practical application utilized to examine the research question within the dissertation (Melendez, 2002).

Dissertation topic: The primary subject of the dissertation (Melendez, 2002).

Operational definition: The specific manner in which observations are to be categorized (Babbie, 1990).

Research Method: refers to the qualitative or quantitative procedures utilized by the researcher (Melendez, 2002).

Research technique: Refers to the specific technique(s) employed by the author in completing a study (Melendez, 2002).

Screwball (comedy): A term used to describe Hollywood comedy films of the 1930's. These films were comedies of absurdity and incongruity. They generally involved the pairing of male and female leads that were reacting to some absurd situation that is somehow depicted as realistic. These comedies were usually characterized by slapstick, brilliant dialogue and physical clowning. *The Thin Man* (Stromberg, 1934) and *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934) are generally acknowledged as the first two films of this genre (Griffith & Mayer, 1970; Pirie, 1981).

Slapstick (comedy): Comedy with the emphasis on fast physical action, farcical situations and obvious jokes that do not depend on language for interpretation. The term comes from an old wooden device used in theater comedy to simulate a blow (Soukhanov, 2001).

### Summary

This chapter has introduced the research problem and provided a rationale for its value and significance in the world of higher education. The following chapter will provide an extensive review of the literature. This review will include the research topic, parallel studies and related film studies. Chapter III will discuss the methodology to be utilized in this research project. Chapter's IV and V will cover the data findings and a thorough analysis of those findings along with the studies' conclusions and recommendations respectively.

## Chapter II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This literature review is focused on the topic of how professors are portrayed in American comedic film in the period 1925 through 1951. The decision to study film portrayals has its genesis in the Thelin text, *A History of American Higher Education* (2004). In chapter six of that text, Success and Excess, Thelin discussed the move from elite to mass access of American higher education. In the discussion he spoke about the sudden popularity of higher education in the American mass media as well as the blossoming of collegiate sports. Along with his mention of print and radio exposure, Thelin discussed the popularity of college-life depicted in American cinema. Thelin used the Marx Brothers comedy film, *Horsefeathers* (Mankiewicz, 1932), as a model for discussing this popularity. *Horsefeathers* was the fourth of 13 movies made by Harpo, Groucho, and Chico Marx (Kanfer, 2000; Louvish, 1999). Upon reflection, this researcher frequently thought of additional comedic films that dealt with the academic life. Over a period of time, this researcher began to casually investigate this phenomenon until he was convinced that it was worthy of a full scale research investigation.

### Review of The Literature

A review of the literature demonstrates that this is an area that has had very little research conducted to date. Simultaneously, the review of the literature also demonstrates that this is an area that needs additional research. Thus, this study becomes exploratory in nature as is often the case in studies that include qualitative aspects (Creswell, 2003,

p.30). The power of the American cinema should not be underrated. It is a potent force in world-wide society. American film has the ability to both mirror society's current attitudes and beliefs and simultaneously the power to shape current attitudes and beliefs. Hinton (1994) stated that the film portrayal of students, professors and administrators directly impacts the status of higher education in society. Since American film dominates the globe, that societal influence is worldwide (Buchsbaum, 1995).

This review of the related literature begins with a discussion about the literature that most closely parallels the subject matter of this research although no literature was located that covered the exact premise of this study. The following section moves into a new domain uncovered in the literature review and that is a discussion of anti-intellectualism. Next, the review moves into ancillary literature that is less directly related to this research, but still relevant to the historical context of the research problem. Having failed to uncover any literature that was directly related to the topic of this research study, the literature review moves into a review of parallel studies. This section is intended to give perspective on the research methodologies used in the past to analyze similar research problems. The last area reviewed is film itself with a special emphasis on the comedy film trends and themes for each decade of this study. Ultimately, the summary of important results and themes uncovered by the review are presented in the section labeled findings.

The literature shows two texts devoted to topics similar to that being investigated by this research project. Another text approached the topic in an ancillary fashion. None of the texts addressed the specific aspect of this investigation. The closest was *The Movies Go to College: Hollywood and the World of the College-life Film* by Umphlett

(1984). The author did an excellent job of breaking down the films that depict college-life. He segmented his book into decades and covers the 1930's through the 1970's. Unfortunately, he all but ignored the professor in film. In fact, he tended to dismiss the character portrayals of the professor in favor of the overall impression of college-life. His book focused on the student interactions, college athletics, college rituals, boosterism and administrative interference in the lives of the students. Another shortcoming of this text is the limited scope of the research. The filmography in the book listed 238 films spanning 1914 to 1981. While this is a substantial number of films, the American Film Institute lists over 600 films on college themes for the 26 year period of 1925 through 1951 alone. Apparently, the author had a rationale for only including a small percentage of the college-life films, but he did not share that with the reader. Another troubling aspect of the text is that the author related none of the film analysis to the history of higher education. An incorporation of the history of higher education in the film analysis would add a great deal of depth and relevance to the discussion.

The second text with some relevance was Hinton's (1994) *Celluloid Ivy: Higher Education in the Movies 1960 to 1990*. Hinton chose a different time frame to study and also focused his research in a different light. The intent of *Celluloid Ivy* was to demonstrate how Hollywood was painting an ever increasingly bleak look at life on the American college campus. However, Hinton did an excellent effort in developing a strong case for studying film in light of higher education portrayals. He argued that students go to college with expectations that often are derived from the media presentation of college and that they may very well experience a radical difference in reality.

Yet another valid argument that he made centers on the implications of negative film portrayals. Hinton argued that since colleges are funded from a combination of private donations and public appropriations, a negative public image can easily result in budgetary restrictions and difficulty in soliciting further donations. A third argument stated that the films themselves are “living sociological documents” (Hinton, 1994, p. 3). He stated that they are literally “pieces of frozen time” (Hinton, 1994, p. 3) that represent the present perhaps, or are a representation of a given period in history. In either event they are a permanent record and one that can be viewed by the film aficionado at any time they choose. That time of the film viewing would then become the present day reality for the viewer and the film’s message is suddenly a current event with regard to the impressions the film lends to the viewer.

*Celluloid Ivy* does have its shortcomings relevant to this research. Again the professor is greatly ignored. The entire subject matter for the professor is reduced to eight pages. Unfortunately, these pages mostly discussed how poorly professors are portrayed and, of course, the time period under discussion is not the same time period as this study nor does it focus on comedy films. Hinton made the same conclusion that Umphlett made in 1984. They both stated that the films they viewed did not offer much substance about the professor and as a result, they both largely ignored them as a discussion point. What both authors failed to recognize is the simple cumulative effect of minor portrayals of professors. Even if professors are only portrayed for a short duration in a particular movie, if you multiply that by the 105 movies in this study you do arrive at a substantial influence. Beyond that, there are films, such as *Bedtime for Bonzo* (Kraike, 1951) and *People Will Talk* (Mankiewicz, 1951), that depict the professor for their entire length and

provide an opportunity for an in-depth analysis of their depiction. Alternately, if the majority of films do not devote much time to the professor role that may say something in and of itself about the Hollywood image of the professor.

Another argument is that even if the film does not relate specifically to higher education, but the character is utilizing the title of professor anyway, then an impression is certainly left behind. If this character is a major contributor to the film, then the impression is that much more potent. The great film comedian W.C. Fields used the title professor in three films that were not college oriented. In each of the three portrayals he played a con artist and in one, *International House* (Sutherland, 1933), a great deal of the humor is extracted from his excessive alcohol consumption (Curtis, 2003; Deschner, 1966; Louvish, 2007). Such a portrayal under the heading of “professor” leaves a disturbing impression behind.

This disturbing impression has its roots in classic American anti-intellectualism. Hofstadter (1970, as cited in Hinton, 1994) wrote the definitive text on anti-intellectualism, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life*. In it, he defined anti-intellectualism as “a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and of those who are considered to represent it; and a disposition constantly to minimize the value of that life” (Hofstadter, in Hinton, 1994, p.144-145). Hofstadter (as cited in Kitch, 2004) framed anti-intellectualism into three categories: (a) *religious anti-rationalism* – a tendency to social conformity and accepting authority; (b) *populist anti-elitism* – accepting of only education for the common person and against the privileged members of society and (c) *unreflective instrumentalism* – seeing the only value in education as the practical application of the education or the material gain it may foster.

Hofstadter recognized that American anti-intellectualism had a long history and in fact, pre-dates the formation of the United States (Bromwich, 1996; Hinton, 1994). His research uncovered quotes from the Puritan, John Cotton who said “The more learned and witty you bee, the more fit to act for Satan will you bee (sic)” (Hofstadter as cited in Gitlin, 2000, p. B8) and Baynard R. Hall who wrote in 1843,

We always preferred an ignorant bad man to a talented one, and hence attempts were usually made to ruin the moral character of a smart candidate; since unhappily smartness and wickedness were supposed to be generally coupled, and incompetence and goodness. (Hofstadter as cited in Gitlin, 2000, p. B8)

Hofstadter theorized that the acceptance of intellect was related to the utility of research. With the boom of science during and after World War II and the subsequent Sputnik scare in 1957 came the birth of the research universities and Eisenhower’s National Defense Education Act. With these came the reluctant acknowledgement that intellect was acceptable: in its place. Intellect was acceptable when there was a direct utility to its efforts such as vaccines or launching satellites. In lieu of these direct, observable benefits intellect was and remains suspect in the minds of the masses (Hofstadter, as cited in Gitlin, 2000).

Another text of significance to this research is a book from 1977, *The College Professor in America: An analysis of the Articles Published in the General Magazine 1890 – 1938* by Bowman. This appears to be the first study to attempt to categorize the image of the professor in any media. This text related how university life is depicted in consumer magazines during the stated time period. Bowman divided his study into five categories: the academic personality, salary and academic life, academic freedom,



teaching and research and the professor in political affairs. Bowman collated the articles into favorable, unfavorable and neutral categories. His results for the academic personality were most distressing. Bowman concluded that the professor is described in the magazines as having a dry, dull and cold intellect, being socially awkward, being afraid of everyone and everything, absent minded, lacking creativity, lacking in human sympathy, lazy, overly analytical and thinking that life is in books. The favorable list is quite short in comparison. Here the professor is listed as being idealistic and anti-business, charming and gracious and frequently pursuing leisure activities.

Bowman's work on salaries and academic life also showed a few surprises. His report of salaries being low is not one of the surprises, but his report on the depiction of academic life is interesting. According to the popular magazines, academic life involves a very short work week, long vacations, good associates to work with, an esteemed position in society, work that the professors are passionate about: almost hobby-like in their pursuit, and a career far removed from commerce. The last area that is pertinent to this topic is the teaching and research section which concluded that research is controversial in respect to whether or not it is even needed. In addition, the articles depicted research as harming teaching and that research often has no utility. This perception of the lack of utility for research most likely continued well into the 1950's as Hofstadter theorized. Ultimately, Bowman concluded that the college professor depicted in popular magazine "articles helped to form the popular stereotypes" (p.180) of the professor in that era.

Claussen (as cited in Park, 2004) augmented both Hofstadter's and Bowman's work with *Anti-intellectualism in American Media: Magazines and Higher education*. He chronicled the anti-intellectualism message from four popular American magazines –

*Time, Life, Readers Digest, and The Ladies Home Journal* – for a 54 year period (1944 – 1998). In essence, Claussen continued Bowman's study but in a broader view that encapsulates anti-intellectualism. Claussen described how the media depicted an assortment of supposed dangers that students face if they should be too studious. Imagined dangers included loneliness, isolation and depression. Conversely, there was a tendency to depict college life through leisure time activities. In sum, the author stated that it is difficult to learn what a student might encounter in their academic life by reading American media. If the American media is the only source, then student activities in the classroom, library and/or laboratory will remain a mystery. Claussen (as cited in Park, 2004) made a strong case that media portrayals of college-life have an impact because they actually deliver and reinforce the message by which higher education is evaluated.

This anti-intellectualism approach also appears in *Fiction to Fact: College Novels and the study of Higher Education* (1988) by Thelin and Townsend although the authors may not have recognized that fact in so many words. Thelin and Townsend did an excellent taxonomy, description and analysis of the depiction of higher education in college genre novels. Among their conclusions are that the heaviest emphasis was on collegiate extracurricular activities and the formal curriculum and faculty were only included in peripheral renderings. They postulate that the media depictions of college-life have a direct impact and influence on the students in any age. They argued that any student that has been exposed to American media will think of college as nothing more than a string of extracurricular activities. They concluded that this desire for extracurricular activity is driven by the student need to be accepted. They also argued that the pursuit of academic excellence would lead to ridicule and outcast status from the

other students. Without labeling it as such, the authors described a student culture that is decidedly anti-intellectual in orientation. Finally, these researchers suggested that those who study higher education should make an effort to read and study the academic fiction that utilize professors, students, colleges and universities as subject matter. In Vandermeer's unpublished doctoral dissertation (1982), that researcher made similar conclusions. She asserted that the academic novel frequently depicted current events in the academy and can be a gauge for current public opinion about the academy. If these researchers feel that academic fiction can be a valuable asset to the study of higher education, it would naturally follow that film has at least as much import and potential influence on the American public not to mention those who study higher education..

The literature review has also uncovered another disturbing impression. In accordance with Bowman (1977), Hofstadter (as cited in Hinton, 1994) and Claussen (as cited in Park, 2004), the literature review shows that *all* aspects of American media depict professors and higher education in a most unflattering light. In *The American College in Fiction*, Boys (1946) discussed over 30 works of fiction and came to some startling conclusions on the representation of the professor. He said that the academic life was depicted as "dreary, depressing and stifling" (p.382) and that the college professor was "usually a queer person, not to be judged by the usual standards of human conduct" (p. 382). His litanies of descriptors are most discouraging: "Unconventional, vain and highly contemptible, bitter about their financial status, unworldly, shy, pedantic, vicious, cruel, shallow, treacherous and generally undesirable" (p.382) are all used to describe the professor as depicted in American Fiction. Boys continued his analysis and stated that the mystery story and the movies "alone probably have done more to present a false picture

of college life than all the rest of our fiction put together. Hollywood shows a boring lack of originality in its depiction of college” (p. 385).

In 1960, Carpenter continued Boys research with *Fiction and the American College*. His research came to the same conclusions. Carpenter described the fiction as depicting the professor as “emotionally depressed and even sexless” (p.446). He also pointed out that the word “academic” has become a term of reproach. His analysis included the observation that virtually all “writers criticize colleges for their negation of the pragmatic realities of business and of the emotional life” (p.449).

In a more recent study, Verrone (1999) looked at the image of the professor in American academic fiction as portrayed in 14 novels published in the 1980 through 1997 time period. Verrone’s review of the literature found few differences in the professor portrayal described by the aforementioned researchers. Belok (1958) is reported by Verrone as concluding that his research on academic novels from 1940 to 1957 depicted the professor as eccentric and disagreeable to the point that Belok claimed the portrayals damaged the image of the professor in higher education. Sheppard (1990) concurs with Belok’s conclusions in *University Fiction*, which is edited by Bevan. Verrone’s research cited that Lyons (1962) reported that the focus of academic novels switched from the student around 1925 and placed its emphasis on the professor through 1960. Lyons also reported that the professor portrayals in his time frame were stereotypes and almost universally negative. Proctor (1957) is quoted by Verrone as finding the novels of this era depicting the professor in a consistently narrow fashion. Proctor complained that the professor is made to “appear absent minded and foolish and generally ignorant about the ways of the world outside the academy” (p.2). Click (1970, as cited in Verrone,1999),

reported that professors were also portrayed in a poor light. Click's unpublished doctoral dissertation covered the time frame of 1920 to 1966.

Verrone (1999) discussed two researchers that do not depict as bleak a picture on the professor portrayal. The unpublished doctoral dissertations of Hedeman (1993) and King (1970) both suggested that the portrayal is not all negative. They argued that the professor of American fiction embodied both virtues and shortcomings as does the population in general. Hedeman did allow that the fictional professors are frequently lacking confidence in their abilities and were generally narcissistic and unhappy with their lives and work. King did qualify his statement by saying that there were as many negative as positive attributes given to the professors.

Other researchers are not as strong in their opinions about the portrayal of the professor but their research is more tangential to this specific subject matter. For instance, Jacobs (1974), conducted research on the American academic novel in the period from only 1960 through 1970. His conclusions included that the professor was becoming modernized at that point in time and beginning to question his role in the professoriate. In 1975 Weber concluded that the professor of fiction was being portrayed as a more dimensional character with conflicting viewpoints and foibles. In 1989 Maddock-Cowart studied 16 academic novels. This researcher concurred with Weber (1975) about the complexity of the fictional professor character in these novels.

Among Verrone's conclusions are that while there may not be a universal depiction of the professor in American academic fiction, the portrayals are frequently quite negative. However, in Verrone's study, *The Image of the Professor in American Academic Fiction 1980-1997* (1999), she concluded among other items, that the professor

depicted in her study time period was not stereotypical. The professor depicted between 1980 -1997 in academic fiction was “individually distinct although some homogeneity is apparent, especially with regard to their personal lives” (p. 142). More current fiction such as Jane Smiley’s *Moo* (1998) and Alison Lurie’s *Truth and Consequences* (2005) are hardly breaking ranks with the denigrating tradition toward the professor of the vast majority of these novels.

In recommendations for further study Verrone (1999) called for additional study on the image of the fictional professor, but also with a twist. While she acknowledged that there is more work to be done on the academic fictional professor she also acknowledged a need to study the personal characteristics of the members of the real professorate. She categorized all of the research that existed on the professorate but emphasized that we know little of the individuals who make up the academy. She stated that a psychological profile of the members of the profession would be beneficial to the study of higher education. This is especially true with the changes occurring in the professorate and the environmental and technological changes occurring in the workplace as well. Finally, she recommended that this research needed to be extended to other genres and specifically called for research on the image of the professor in film.

Academic fiction is not the only segment of media that depicted professors and higher education in an undesirable light. Butchart and Cooper (1987) analyzed popular music in *Perceptions of Education in the Lyrics of American Popular Music, 1950 – 1980*. They analyzed 200 recordings from this time period. Their research showed that formal education is frequently depicted as “dehumanizing, irrelevant, alienating, laughable, isolating and totally unworthy of any link with the Socratic tradition” (p. 272).

literature can be found, although it may be only indirectly related to the study at hand” (p.82). As it turns out, many different minorities and ethnic group portrayals have been evaluated in film. What follows is a discussion of some of that research.

In *The Kaleidoscopic Lens: How Hollywood Views Ethnic Groups* (Miller, 1980), nine different ethnic groups’ film depictions were analyzed by nine different authors. Blacks, Asians, American Indians, Hispanics, Germans, Irish, Italians, Jews, and Slavs are all discussed. In each case the analysis is contextual and thematic with the films themselves being offered as proof of the authors’ point of discussion. *Hollywood’s Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film* (O’Connor & Rollins, 1998) used a similar approach but also adds chapters devoted to case studies of specific films. The case studies are of exemplars for both positive and negative portrayals of the Native American. *Latino Images in Film* (Berg, 2002) utilized this same research approach – thematic, contextual and case study but also spent a significant portion of the text discussing, analyzing and clarifying all aspects of stereotyping in general. Finally, *Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls: Gender in Film at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Pomerance, 2001) placed its emphasis on the case study technique. Predictably, these case studies were focused upon specific films and their gender depiction. However, in addition to the obvious, there are several chapters dedicated to foreign film depictions of gender. Iran, Hong Kong, Poland and Asian films were all given their due. The realm of psychiatry in film was also studied. In *Movies and Mental Illness: Using Films to Understand Psychotherapy* (2005), Wedding, Boyd and Neimiec analyzed the depiction of mental illness by Hollywood utilizing the identical tools of contextual, thematic and case study analysis.

What one finds in all of these texts, as well as the previously discussed movie titles, is a surprising homogeneity of research. All of the researchers utilized the contextual and thematic approach with a lesser or greater emphasis on the case study. None of these exemplars have utilized any attempt at quantification in any aspect whatsoever. Not even an attempt at rudimentary descriptive statistics. While the contextual analysis has a huge impact on a truly deeper synthesis of the ideas being discussed, one would think that some statistical analysis would only serve to bolster those arguments and augment the depth of the analysis.

#### American Produced Plays and Fiction

There have also been numerous plays written about the academic life. In fact, to date there have been 20 films made that have their genesis from play writes. Some of these playwrights have been quite prominent in their own right. They include Eugene O'Neill (*Strange Interlude*, 1932), George Bernard Shaw (*Pygmalion*, 1938), Edward Albee (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf*, 1966) and Thornton Wilder (*Our Town*, 1940) to name just a few. The same can be said for fiction writers. To date there have been 45 films made from academically oriented novels. These films have sprung from the imaginations of the like of H.G. Wells, Jules Verne and Ian Fleming. Even the teenage perennially popular Hardy Boys book series included the college genre. In 1944, *The Melted Coins* was released under the authorship of Franklin W. Dixon. The plot centered on a coin swindle that leads to a college campus. More recently we have seen novels from Jane Smiley (*Moo*, 1998) and Alison Lurie (*Foreign Affairs*, 1979; *Truth and*



*Consequences*, 2005). Obviously, it is not just Hollywood that is attracted to the American professor genre.

### The Comedic Film Perspective

Since this research intends to utilize films as essentially research subjects, it is vital that the literature that tracks comedic film trends of the study era be chronicled along with the literature review of higher education and media depictions. Toward this aim, two books in particular provide an excellent overview and description of the types of comedy being done in the various decades of the 20th century. They are *The Movies* by Griffith and Mayer (1970) and *The Anatomy of the Movies* edited by Pirie (1981). There is a great deal of congruity between the two texts as they discuss the comedy trends as well as their descriptions of the individual themes of the decades.

The 1920's were truly a turbulent time for Hollywood. Film comedy from its infancy had been rather chaotic and rough and tumble. The predominant product in the comedy genre of this period was the short film. These were films that are described as one, two, three or sometimes four reels of film. Their running time would be from approximately ten minutes to 40 minutes with the norm being 20 to 25 minutes of film. The dominant studio of the early period was Mack Sennett's Keystone Studio. By the mid to late 1920's the Hal Roach Studios were significantly cutting into the Sennett brand. This decade also saw the film comedy expanding to feature length films as well as the introduction of synchronized sound to film in late 1928. The first film with partial synchronized sound was 1927's *The Jazz Singer* (Crossland, 1927) starring Al Jolson.

However, it took the various studios some time before synchronized sound was universal.

Both Pirie (1981) and Griffith and Mayer (1970) agreed that the trends in comedy film of the 1920's were parody and slapstick. Any successful film in any genre would almost immediately be ridiculed in a comedic film that parodied the successful film. For instance, Rudolph Valentino had a successful film entitled *Blood and Sand* (Zanuck, 1922) in 1922. That same year Stan Laurel parodies that film with his own solo effort entitled *Mud and Sand* (Roach, 1922).

The slapstick label was a broad label. It generally refers to fast paced physical comedy with outlandish situations and jokes that were generally independent of language for their successful laughs. It may be that slapstick owed its origins to the fact that most film of the 1920's was silent. The slapstick technique resulted in laughs without any language barriers. The successful comedy stars of this period included Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd, Buster Keaton, Harry Langdon, Fatty Arbuckle and the team of Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy (McDonald, et al, 1973; McPherson, 2005; Mitchell, 1995 & 1997; Sweeney, 2007). Harold Lloyd was the top box office draw for the decade (Briggs, 2005).

Both Pirie (1981) and Griffith and Mayer (1970) were also in agreement with the trends of the 1930's. The Hollywood of the 1930's was experimenting with sound in films. As a result, there seems to have been an added emphasis on language and dialogue in these films. 1934 saw the birth of a type of film that has been labeled as screwball comedy. The two films cited as beginning this trend were *The Thin Man* (Stromberg, 1934) and *It Happened One Night* (Capra, 1934). *It Happened One Night* was the first

that it was reborn in other comedians. Danny Kaye's film career was modeled precisely after Harold Lloyd's up to and including purchasing Lloyd scripts and redoing the film with Kaye. Keaton, on the other hand, realized his performing days were dwindling and found work as a gag writer at MGM studios. There he teamed with Red Skelton as his protégé and guided Red's film career. Here to, Keaton redid some of his earlier masterpieces with Skelton. Some of Skelton's finest work of the late 1940's into the early 1950's was attributable to Keaton either through remakes or Keaton's contributions to the films.

However, as you had some luminaries careers diminished you also had some flourish. In particular, sound truly made W.C. Fields film career. Fields had done some silent films but not with much success. Fields steadily built a formidable film career from the 1930's through to his death in the mid 1940's. Griffith and Mayer characterized Fields screen persona as an irascible curmudgeon. Fields created a character that had mostly negative attributes like imbibing alcohol, lying, cheating, child hating and swindling people out of their money (Ford, 1967). Yet somehow, Fields was able to use his persona and his distinctive voice to make people laugh. Knight (as cited in Deschner, 1966), gave us a wonderful definition of film comedy. He stated that comedy was "defined as a tragedy that happens to someone else; the jest is improved when that somebody else is a good deal less than amiable" (p.18). This may have been Fields genius. He generally made himself the butt of the screen jokes and his screen character was anything but loveable. Maltin (1982) said that "his nonconformist attitudes have made his films more popular today than they were when they first came out" (p.150).

The 1940's had some distinction of its own within film comedy. In the 1940's we saw the birth of three major film comedy teams. Abbott and Costello, Hope and Crosby and Martin and Lewis all began in this decade. The decade began with Abbott and Costello bursting on the scene. In fact, that duo practically owned Hollywood for the remainder of the decade as they were consistently on the top of the box office list year after year. Their brand of humor was both physical with high energy, and verbal. Frequently their humor relied on wordplay for their laughs as in their memorable routine "Who's on First" (Furmanek & Palumbo, 1991).

This formula for laughs was duplicated by Bob Hope and Bing Crosby with perhaps more emphasis on verbal rather than physical humor although their Road pictures certainly contained their fair share of physical humor. These Road pictures (*Road to Bali* (Dare, 1952), *Road to Singapore* (Thompson, 1940)) were quite successful and the series ran from 1940 until 1962. Bob Hope also had a successful and simultaneous solo career in film comedy. Maltin (1982) described the perfect Hope vehicle of this era:

"First a solid story peg; second, a glamorous leading lady; third, ample opportunity for Hope to run the gamut of his comic emotions – bravado backed by sheer cowardice, baseless egotism, an eye for pretty girls and finally, plenty of room for wisecracks" (p.187).

At the end of the 1940's decade Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis made their debut in *My Friend Irma* (Wallis, 1949). Their brand of humor was described as zany and boundless. While they continued the physical and verbal recipe of their predecessors, the Martin and Lewis comedy film was extremely high energy and somewhat unpredictable. In some ways they were reminiscent of the Marx Brothers comedies. Their success was

immediate and they sustained that success until the mid 1950's when they broke up.

Maltin (1982) described Martin and Lewis as “the hottest act in show business, bar none” (p.218) by the early 1950's.

Of course the most significant event of the 1940's was World War II. That cataclysmic event affected all facets of life including comedy film. During the war years many of the comedies became military themed. In *Abbott and Costello go to Hollywood* (1991), Furmanek and Palumbo commented on this theme. Abbott and Costello had such success with their army film *Buck Privates* (Gottlieb, 1941) that they went on to make two more films showcasing the navy and the air corps in that same year. They even returned to the army for a successful sequel entitled *Buck Privates Come Home* (Arthur, 1947). The same was true for Martin and Lewis, but their films were done in a peace time vein. These films included *At War With the Army* (Finkelhoffe, 1951), *Sailor Beware* (Wallis, 1952) and *Jumping Jacks* (Wallis, 1952). It could be said that this period supplied escapist type humor for the nation at war and its immediate aftermath. Griffith and Mayer (1970) stated “Hollywood was performing its old function of providing an emotional refuge for the nation.” (p. 377).

The post war period also had its own trend. There was a softening of humor in this era. Pirie (1981) wrote of a sentimental comedy period. These films were more inclined to tug at our heart strings while making us laugh. There was also a religious comedy trend as well. Films like *Going My Way* (McCarey, 1944) and the *Bell's of St. Mary's* (McCarey, 1945) in which Bing Crosby played a priest were quite popular with audiences and the Hollywood establishment alike.

Naturally, there were other comedy film developments in this decade. The 1940's saw the birth of the Francis the talking mule series with Donald O'Connor, the successful seven picture *Ma and Pa Kettle* series was born with the *Egg and I* (Erskine, 1947) in 1947 and Clifton Webb began his *Mr. Belvidere* series during this decade. This last series included *Mr. Belvidere Goes to College* (Engel, 1949). *The Thin Man* series was still going strong in this decade as were the Marx Brother, W.C Fields, Harold Lloyd and Laurel and Hardy among others. In sum, each of these decades brought a veritable wealth of comedic stars and trends that still persist today.

#### A Case in Point

In the creation of American film comedy, one avenue for creating humor is to exaggerate the norms, mores, foibles, and idiosyncrasies of the characters, settings or plot that the film is constructed around. In the case of the faculty member of the American university, these exaggerations could lead to potentially destructive perceptions cum realities as discussed previously. One classic example of this destructive perception would be the film, *The Absent Minded Professor* (Walsh, 1961). As the title implies, the professor is depicted as an extraordinarily forgetful person who has his head so far in the scientific clouds that he has great difficulties with daily functions and human interactions. A film by this title was first released in 1914. Walt Disney made his version in 1961 and it was a remarkable success. Disney followed it with the successful sequel, *Son of Flubber* (Disney, 1963), in 1963. *The Absent Minded Professor* was re-released in 1967 and again was very successful (Maltin, 2000). The Disney studios re-made the original movie yet again in 1988 as a made-for-television film. This version spawned both a television and a cable television series. Finally, Disney remade the original once more in

### The Foreign Film Perspective

At least one researcher (Hinton, 1994), has indicated that the plight of the college-themed movie is quite different in Europe. He argued that the intellectual as an entity is more highly regarded in Europe as compared to America. Hinton singles out the 1977 Polish film, *Camouflage* (Zannuzi, 1977), as a movie as far removed from the American depiction of the intellectual life as one can find. However, a closer inspection of this film shows that while there is a basis for Hinton's observations in the film content, the specific portrayal of the professor bears discussion as well. In *Camouflage*, the role of one of the protagonists is a character of a professor. He is described as a cunning, manipulative person who is constantly at odds with the students and another professor. This portrayal of the professor is hardly one that will garner platitudes for the intellectual life.

Since this initial investigation appears to have shown the professor in a poor light, this researcher decided to study foreign film depictions of professors. It was hoped that this study would determine a sense of how the professor is portrayed in film around the world. Since identifying foreign film content is far more difficult than for American film, the parameters of the primary study were not followed. The foreign films are not restricted to comedies nor are the dates of the films restricted. The films range from 1920 to 2003. Every decade is represented except the 1960's. A frequency distribution showed that the most popular decade was the 1990's with five films. However, the frequency distribution also shows an apparent increase in films depicting professors. There were three in the 1970's, four in the 1980's, five in the 1990's and so far in 2000, there are four

films. Thirty-two foreign films were identified. However, only 22 of these movies could have their plot identified through the literature. These 22 movies became the basis for the study. The 22 films represented 17 individual nations. Every region of the world is represented except South America. The represented regions include Europe, North America, Nordic nations, Middle Asia, Asia, Africa and the Australian region.

Of the 22 films studied, only four present the professor in a positive light. This represents only an 18 percent favorable depiction. A Lebanese movie portrays a kindly, blind professor of literature who is censored for his publications on sensuality in Arab literature (Reynaud, 2006). A Portuguese film shows a distinguished female professor on vacation with her daughter. As the film unfolds, the professor is depicted as knowledgeable, kind, patient, and loving toward her daughter (Eyny & Zubatov, 2006). An Italian movie shows a professor as a political dissident from Mussolini (Graham, 2006). Finally, a film from India depicts a professor as an amiable and highly respected man (retrieved from [www.us.imdb.com](http://www.us.imdb.com)). Oddly, of these four favorable professor depictions three of them are murdered in their respective films! What this fact may mean is certainly open for speculation. However, it is equally noteworthy enough to include here even without comment or speculation.

The negative portrayal of the professor accounted for 18 films or 82 percent of the movies studied. Not only was the negative portrayal decidedly skewed, but the content of the films are most disturbing. The professor in these foreign films are depicted as murderers (2)(Shambu, 2006), a snuff film advocate (Rodriguez-Ortega, 2006), an alcoholic gambler (retrieved from [www.us.imdb.com](http://www.us.imdb.com), 2006), as suffering from mental illness and sexual perversion (Hutchison, 2006), a street drug abuser and adulterer



(2)(retrieved from [www.us.imdb.com](http://www.us.imdb.com), 2006) three with a foolish portrayal or as objects of ridicule from their students (Collins, 2006; Kasman, 2006; Price, 2006) two as 'mad scientist 'types (Lauria, 2006) four with severe personality disorders and two of the four with sexual problems as well (Savage, 2006) a thief (O'Donoghue, 2006) and one with an incestual relationship with his niece (Jacoby, 2006).

Not only is the professor often poorly depicted in this sampling of foreign films, but the professor is represented by a remarkable litany of society's most undesirable attitudes and traits. These negative media professor portrayals are powerful and can severely impact society's perception of the professor as an individual and maybe, higher education as a whole. Furthermore, the concept of foreign films presenting the members of the academy in a positive light does not appear to be sustained. In fact, the representation of the professor seen here is far more disturbing and includes more violation of public mores and taboos than one is likely to find in comparatively conservative American cinema.

### Findings

The review of the literature has demonstrated several viable conclusions. In all of the aspects of American media studied, the university professor is depicted predominantly in a negative manner. The media studied are academic fiction novels, cinema, song lyrics, plays and by extension, television. The negative depiction of the professor is mostly uniform and possibly provides a ripple effect throughout the academy. Moreover, it appears that the depiction of the professor is almost universally *not* integral to the plot of the film. The professor is a peripheral character in movies as

well as the other media enumerated. Therefore, the depiction of the professor in American film is either non-essential to the Hollywood university or the depiction is one of negativity. Neither result is complimentary. Some of this negativity reaches the nefarious heights of depicting professors as 'confidence men.' The American media portrayal of professors appears to have its roots in anti-intellectualism.

The study of film is extensive. Many researchers have studied many different groups to analyze how they are portrayed in film. However, the literature review has showed that very little research has been done on how the professor is depicted in film. It has further illuminated the fact that there appears to be no research conducted to date that covers the professor's depiction in comedic films from 1925 through 1951. The research that has been conducted has been completed by graduate students and professors of higher education, sociologists and cinema professionals. Quizzically, the research that has been conducted has omitted even the faintest attempt at quantification. All of the research analyzed here has shown that the researchers used thematic, contextual and varying degrees of case study in their strictly qualitative studies. Had the studies been designed with a quantitative aspect to them, their results would most likely have been richer with both added depth and impact to the analysis.

The review of the literature for comedy film trends and themes by the decades under study here showed some differences in both concepts for the various decades. The comedy films of the 1920's were predominantly directed toward parody and slapstick humor. The 1930's continued the slapstick theme and added a new category, the screwball comedy with a strong emphasis on the newly acquired sound dimension. The 1940's vacillated between military themes, slapstick, sentimental comedies and dialogue

universities. The results of this study should contribute to the scholarship that already exists on the image of the professor in other media that has been conducted previously.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

This research study has been and will continue to be guided by a research question and subsidiary questions. The research question is: In what manner are professors depicted in American comedic films during the period 1925 through 1951 and is there any aspect of the history of higher education in America that is the basis for that depiction? The following subsidiary questions seek to uncover the traits portrayed in the studies' films of the institution, both personal and professional traits of the professor and the film traits.

This research proposal required several phases of research in order to design a reasonable study. The first step was to identify all relevant films. The second phase was to conduct a literature search for similar or related research. Third, since the topic appears to be somewhat scarce, a dissertation search was conducted as part of the literature review. Fourth, a search of similar topics, such as nurses in film, was conducted for at least a review of the methodology used in those studies. Finally, a search was conducted to determine which films are available for viewing in either the VHS or DVD format.

The years selected for this study have their origin in practicality and film history. The film history aspect was to include two particularly prominent films. These films are *The Freshman* (Lloyd, 1925) by Harold Lloyd and *College* (Schenck, 1927) by Buster Keaton. These two films are believed to be the archetypical college films and the blueprint for most films that followed by at least two scholars, Umphlett (1984) and Hinton (1994). They also are silent films, which is a prominent area of our film history and should be represented in this study. Moreover, they are made by two of our greatest

film comedians and that adds additional credence to the historical perspective. The back end of the study, 1951, was chosen so as to not make the time frame too large and cumbersome to research and for additional historical rationales. The 1951 films include *Bedtime for Bonzo* (Kraike, 1951), starring Ronald Reagan; *People will talk* (Zanuck, 1951), starring Cary Grant and *That's my Boy!* (Howard, 1951), starring Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. In this list are a future President of the United States, a major Hollywood luminary and the last comedy team in film history to date. As a backdrop, this particular time period is also the same period that American higher education moved from a system of elite higher education to mass higher education.

The first initiative was to develop a list of appropriate comedic American films in the period 1925-1951. To achieve this goal, a data base search was conducted of the American Film Institute (AFI). Keywords in the search were *comedy, college, university, professor, higher education, college-life* and *education*. The parameters were “comedy films from 1925 to 1951” and the searches were conducted in the areas of subject, genre, and plot summary.

While the AFI film data base is a phenomenal resource, limitations were soon discovered. The most productive searches were for the keywords college-life (234), professor (417), and college (111). A review of these lists showed that they were not all comedies and that the lists did not fully match each other as they should. This necessitated the painstaking chore of collating all three lists into one large comprehensive list of 600+ films. Next, each film had to be checked for its genre. This involved the use of the Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) which purports to have every film ever made in its data base. In order for the film to be acceptable, it had to be listed as a comedic film

and the title or cast had to include the character of a professor. This genre search reduced the list substantially to approximately 100 films.

Another approach to the same information was to compile a list of the major comedians and comedic actors who performed in the study time period. This list was compiled from the database of the Friar's Club, a New York based private club for comedians as well as internet searches for comedians and actors (retrieved from [www.friarsclub.com/](http://www.friarsclub.com/)). Then this researcher compiled filmographies for each appropriate comedian and cross matched these results with the AFI results. The filmographies were compiled from texts and internet searches. These films were then checked in the IMDB using the same criteria as previously discussed. This was intended as a technique to be as thorough as possible in developing the list. The final result was a list of 105 (see Appendix B) comedy films that portray a professor in some capacity. It is believed that this is a more than reasonably comprehensive list and the only one of its kind.

The literature search has not been particularly productive. The only texts of significance are a book, *The College Professor in America: An Analysis of the Articles Published in the General Magazine 1890 – 1938* by Bowman (1977) who studied university life in print, a text from 1984, *The Movies Go to College: Hollywood and the World of the College-Life Film* by Umphlett (1984) on college-life depicted in film and a book from 1994, *Celluloid Ivy: Higher Education in the Movies 1960 – 1990* by Hinton that discussed the negative portrayal of higher education in that time frame. With the assistance of a librarian we conducted substantial searches of several databases. These databases included Proquest, Worldcat, NJCAT and several others. This search yielded a few articles on how higher education is depicted in fiction novels and one article on how

music lyrics depict education. All of these sources are discussed in detail in the literature review in chapter two.

The dissertation search has been included with some success. A dissertation from 1991 at Vanderbilt University covered a similar theme, college-life portrayals in film, from a different time period. An interlibrary loan request was submitted for that dissertation, but it was refused. A similar fate occurred with two other dissertations, Schwartz (1963) and Schuth (1972) identified previously. Fortunately, the Vanderbilt dissertation was turned into a text (*Celluloid Ivy*, Hinton, 1994) and that text conducts a thorough analysis of the other two dissertations. Disappointingly, the dissertation/text itself did not lead to valuable sources in the literature search because it focused upon a different time period and specifically analyzed college –life portrayals to the virtual exclusion of the professor.

The search for similar topics has been fruitful. Several texts have been identified that cover the portrayal of mental illness, the plight of the Native American, Latino images in film, gender differences and a cross-section of ethnic studies. These texts were located using the Worldcat data base with the keywords, *film studies* and *minority film studies*. These texts are to be utilized strictly as methodology references and are discussed at length in the literature review in chapter two. Finally, several letters were sent to prominent movie critics seeking their advice and counsel on this research topic. Unfortunately, none of these critics responded. Additionally, this researcher wrote to actors who appeared in some of the films on the final list. This was to elicit their thoughts on the particular portrayal of the professor that they were involved in or enacted. Jerry Lewis (*That's my Boy!*, Howard, 1951; *The Nutty Professor*, Wallis, 1963 & Lewis, 1996)

and Mickey Rooney (*Love Laughs at Andy Hardy*, Sisk, 1947) have been identified as possible contacts. Unfortunately, neither of these actors responded to the inquiries.

### Conceptual Framework

The development of the conceptual framework was by far the most difficult challenge in preparing this proposal. This study intends to analyze the depiction of professors in American comedic films made between 1925 and 1951. But within what framework should that analysis proceed? The work-life of a faculty member is difficult to quantify. Finkelstein and Schuster (2006) stated that “Academic work is different from many other kinds of work. It defies the establishment of clear boundaries”(p.78).

However, their work on the study of American faculty has helped immensely in shaping this framework as did Burton Clark’s “Small Worlds, Different Worlds: The Uniqueness and Troubles of American Academic Professions” (1997).

The data collection instrument is structured under four headings. Those headings are:

(a) Institutional traits, (b) professor – personal traits, (c) professor – professional traits and (d) film traits.

### Institutional Traits

This study will profile the image of the professor as depicted in American comedy films released from 1925 to 1951. The institution depicted will play a part in that description since the institutional category can help to mold the faculty role in that institution. In order to describe the institution, seven variables were selected. One variable is the type of institution, whether a public or private university or none depicted at all. This will be determined by language within the film or signage on the university campus. The size of the institution will be determined as to whether it is small, large or



not depicted. That will be determined by the language and images depicted in the film. The locale of the university depicted will be selected among urban, rural, suburban or no depiction. That gauge will be determined by visual clues of the surrounding environment within the film when possible. The educational level of the institution will be divided between undergraduate, graduate or no depiction. This will be determined primarily by language in the film and perhaps, instruction demonstrated. The areas of the campus shown in the movie will be divided amongst dormitory, auditorium, cafeteria, classroom, athletic field, campus grounds, mixture of these or no depiction. The gender taught at the school will be classified as to a male school, female school, coed or no depiction. Finally, the architecture presented in the film will be categorized as to monuments, grandiose buildings, athletic stadiums, Quonset huts, or athletic buildings. In sum, these are variables that will likely be observable and in total, will provide a reasonable profile of the type of institution being displayed. A clear understanding of the type of institution being portrayed in the films will add some depth to our understanding of the faculty portrayal.

#### Professor – Personal Traits

To profile the personal traits of the professor portrayed in these films 12 variables were selected by this author. Several of these variables are rather obvious. Items such as the professor's race, age, gender, origin (native or foreign), and career stage (early, middle, late, retired, N/A) should be easily discernible from viewing the movies. This demographic information will help draw a clear understanding of exactly what model of a professor is being displayed by Hollywood. The career stage of the professor may add some understanding to what other aspects of the professor role are or are not being

portrayed. For instance, a depiction of an early to middle career stage professor may be more inclined to show the active pursuit of research. In addition, the professor's appearance will be recorded based upon neat versus unkempt, professional attire versus non-professional attire or a mixture of these categories. The personality will be recorded according to normal, eccentric, or nerd-like. Eccentric will be distinguished by the level of unusual behavior displayed. If the behavior is not always rational, or perhaps forgetful, then it will be labeled eccentric. A "nerd-like" personality refers to one that is a combination of appearance, speech and personality that is lacking in normal social graces.

The last five variables all focus on the role of the professor within the film. One variable will distinguish between the roles being one dimensional versus a developed character. The quality of the role will measure if the role is superfluous to the plot, incidental to the plot or instrumental to the plot. The role focus will be recorded as to whether the professional life or non-professional life is depicted, whether the professor's family is portrayed or whether there is a mixture of these, or perhaps no portrayal of an actual professor (sometimes the title is used although there is no actual professor). If an actual professor is not portrayed in the film, than the role that is portrayed with the title professor will be noted. Finally, the economic status of the professor will be noted according to wealthy, average, poor or not shown. These last five variables should be easily deciphered during the viewing of each film. In total, these 12 variables should create an accurate description of the personal traits of the professor that is portrayed in the American comedy films from 1925-1951. For this time period, the present author would expect to see a Caucasian, male professor who was recruited from a family of

independent wealth because the pay was so low for the professorate (Finkelstein & Schuster, 2006, p.71; Veysey, 1965, p.352).

#### Professor – Professional Traits

The obvious choice for beginning the framework analysis for the professional portrayal of the professor is the usual trinity of the professoriate: teaching, research, and institutional and public service (Finkelstein & Schuster, 2006). With teaching there are some obvious choices like whether or not any pedagogy is portrayed. But teaching is a complex function involving several inter-related tasks. Finkelstein and Schuster (2006) differentiated those tasks into four categories: material preparation, presentation or delivery of the material (academic subjects, professional, personal), assessment of student learning (oral or written) and interaction with students about course content (classroom, campus meeting, social meeting, romance, sporting event). This, therefore, is the operational definition for the primary functions of teaching and will form the basis of the film analysis regarding teaching. During the viewings, the teaching aspect of the films will be quantified as being present or not according to the Finkelstein/Schuster matrix.

Research is not as easy to structure because the word research means so many different things to so many differing academic professions – Clark’s (1997) “Small Worlds, Different Worlds” theme still prevails. However, in the film analysis it should be reasonable to observe any attempts at trying to depict research or not. This may involve a laboratory or experimental setting, a comment on research activity, a reference to the importance of publishing, a depiction of writing or many other possible configurations that will be developed by the research itself. The important factor will be whether or not research is depicted in the films.

Institutional and public service are probably the least understood of the professorate trinity (Finkelstein & Schuster, 2006). It involves the faculty involvement in campus governance, among other things. This could include such acts as departmental involvement and campus-wide involvement in such matters as the faculty senate or short-term academic task forces and committees used to study problems or issues affecting the campus or as a faculty advisor to a student club. Off-campus activities might include consulting work, boosterism, volunteer activities with local civic or governmental entities, program promotion, seeking donations, accreditation work and professional development or other areas as developed by the research (Finkelstein & Schuster, 2006). Naturally, these activities or lack thereof may fluctuate widely depending on the institution being depicted, the location of the institution and the career stage of the faculty member being depicted. However, an accurate portrayal of a faculty member is likely to include some reference toward the service obligation and any and all or no service depictions will be recorded during the viewings (Clark, 1997; Finkelstein & Schuster, 2006). Finally, the degree of the professor (masters, doctorate or N/A) will be discerned by the language and perhaps signage within the film. These 11 variables as a group should develop an accurate description of how the professional role of the professor is depicted in the comedy films of this study era.

### Film Traits and Data Analysis

This conceptual analysis has been distilled into a comprehensive table. The table includes each area of focus (see Appendix C). The table is divided into four sub headings: (a) institutional traits, (b) professor – personal traits, (c) professor – professional traits

and (d) film traits. The film traits utilize the film genre categories that were developed by the Internet Movie Database website ([www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)). Those categories are: comedy, musical-comedy, mystery-comedy, fantasy-comedy, drama-comedy, action-comedy and biography-comedy. The definitions for each of these film traits are included in Appendix D. The table is listed in Appendix C and will be utilized for the data collection purposes. For each film viewed, one of these documents will be completed while the film is being viewed to the extent the film allows. The data collection instrument is designed objectively with clear definitions for each descriptor. Anyone viewing the films should be able to record the same findings as this researcher.

After viewing the entire sample of films, the results will be tabulated for each item on the chart and descriptive statistics will be utilized for their analysis. The percentages for each descriptor in each of the 31 categories will be tabulated. These results will be reported out in table form. The results for each subheading (institutional traits, professor – personal traits, professor – professional traits, and film traits) will be reported out separately under each subheading as part of the data analysis in chapter IV. The conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from this data analysis will be presented in chapter V.

### Sampling

Once the movie list was completed (see Appendix B), a search was conducted to determine which of the films will be reviewed as part of this study. Since there is a compelling argument that the films of yesterday still exert a significant influence today, this researcher feels it is vitally important to only include films that are readily available

for viewing by today's consumer. If a film is not available for the consumer to purchase or rent for subsequent viewing, then the influence of that film would be significantly diminished today. Toward that aim, a search was conducted of the 105 films on the final film list to ascertain their availability. Both rental companies and purchasing companies were searched to arrive at the final sample of films for this study. The quantity of films that proved to be available for viewing in either the VHS or DVD format was 44. That figure represents the substantial percentage of 42 percent of the total film list of 105.

The availability of the films from the complete film list seems to match the original argument of this study. That is, each of the 44 films that are available for purchase or rental has a major Hollywood luminary acting in the movie. The films that are unavailable in this fashion all contain Hollywood actors of significantly lesser stature. This fact seems to substantiate the argument that the Hollywood stars of yesterday still have a significant fan base today. It is unlikely that manufacturers would produce a DVD without being reasonably certain that there is a market for that DVD with today's consumer.

The frequency distribution of this film sample followed nicely within the decades of the study years. There are four out of six films available from the 1950's, 21 out of 50 from the 1940's, 16 out of 35 from the 1930's and three out of 13 from the 1920's. The two full decades naturally have the largest quantity of films to be viewed. On a percentage basis each decade ranged from a low of 23 percent of the films in the 1920's to a high of 66 percent of the films from the 1950's that will be watched and analyzed. The two full decades have 46 percent of their films to be viewed from the 1930's and 42 percent from the 1940's. The complete film list is ordered from 1951 back to 1925 in

chronological order by year the film was released. All of the films that are included in this study are indicated with an asterisk next to the title and year of release. As stated previously, the films represent 42 percent of the complete movie list developed by this researcher. This should be a more than adequate sample size to insure the integrity, reliability and validity of the study. Appendix B contains the complete film list and the list of films included in this study as described here.

### Limitations of the Study

The research parameters of this study simultaneously create a sound methodological approach to this research while also imposing limitations. One limitation is that this research focuses entirely on comedic film. It is quite possible that a similar study that focuses on drama might develop different findings. Another limitation is the time period of this study. Again, a different time period could produce different results even in comedic film. Finally, this study intends to focus entirely on quantitative data. A similar qualitative study could conceivably produce alternate findings or at least, differing emphasis on specific variables.

### Summary

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methodology that has been utilized to this point in the study as well as a detailed description of the methodology yet to come. The conceptual framework in particular was discussed. The four sub-headings for this research were introduced: institutional traits, professor – personal traits, professor -professional traits and film traits. For each of these categories the individual descriptors

were itemized and explained. Finally, the sample of the study was detailed and explained. The following chapter will present the data analysis and findings.



## Chapter IV

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A total of 105 films were identified as belonging to the sample for this research study. The films were ordered in reverse chronological order based upon the year of their release. That list of films is contained in Appendix B. Of these 105 movies, 44 were selected for this study. Those 44 films were selected by their availability to be viewed today. Searches were conducted for the 105 films identified as the sample in this study. The first search was to determine the specific films of the sample that could be rented for viewing. The second search was conducted to identify the particular films that would be available to be purchased for viewing. Two films needed to be substituted for the final study as compared to the initial list of study films. A film from 1935 entitled *Seven Keys to Baldpate* (Schlom, 1947) proved to be unavailable during the above mentioned searches. However, a film from 1948 entitled *The Return of October* (Mate, 1948) was available when it was originally unavailable. As a result, the latter film was substituted for the former. This change kept the original projection of sample films intact at 44 films to be viewed for the data collection. The list of films contained in Appendix B accurately reflects these changes. The 44 films selected represent 42 percent of the total number of films identified for this study or, put another way, the sampling ratio was virtually every other film. The frequency distribution of the selected films by decade for this study is three from the 1920's, 15 from the 1930's, 22 from the 1940's and four from the 1950's. This distribution accurately reflects the study parameters and distribution of the original sample. All 44 films were available for viewing for this study (see Appendix B).

The 44 films were viewed and a data collection instrument (see Appendix A) was completed for each film to the extent that each film allowed. The data collection instrument was developed specially for this study and it contains 31 different categories of data. The criterion for each descriptor for each variable on the data collection instrument is described on pages 48 through 53 of this study. This criterion was developed and honed via a pilot study of 12 films that was conducted during the summer of 2008. Upon completion of the viewings, the 44 cases were tabulated. The tabulated data was analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics. This section will contain an analysis of the data as it pertains to each heading on the data collection instrument. The headings of the data collection instrument are: (a) institutional traits; (b) professor – personal traits; (c) professor – professional traits; and (d) film traits. These four headings correspond with the subsidiary questions numbers one through four as reported on pages 13 and 14 of this study.

#### Institutional Traits

The heading of institutional traits contains seven variables. They are: type of institution, size of the institution, location of the institution, education level, campus location, gender composition of student body and architecture. The criterion for each descriptor for each variable on the data collection instrument is described on pages 45 through 46 of this study.

For the type of the institution the choices were public, private or none depicted. The percentage of depictions for public was 7 percent. The depictions were divided primarily between private universities (45%) and no university depicted, with this last category representing the majority at 48 percent.

The descriptors for the size of the institution were small, large and none shown. The small category was depicted 34 percent of the time while the large was depicted 21 percent of the time. The largest percentage went to none shown with 45 percent of the portrayals.

The institution location was distributed between rural, urban, suburban and not shown. Again, the largest percentage (55%) was in the not shown category. Of the remaining categories, suburban was the next largest at 30 percent, followed by urban at 9 percent and 7 percent for rural.

The education level of the institution was divided among the choices of undergraduate, graduate and not shown. There was only one depiction of graduate school (2%). The not shown category was again the largest at 52 percent. The undergraduate education level was depicted 45 percent of the time.

Campus location had eight possible choices. They are dormitory, auditorium, cafeteria, classroom, athletic field, campus grounds, mixture and none depicted. Forty-five percent of the depictions fell under none depicted. The second highest at 41 percent was a mixture of locales without any apparent dominant pattern. Next was the classroom at 9 percent. The only other choices selected were athletic field and campus grounds with each coming in at 2 percent.

The gender composition of the student body was broken down between male school, female school, coed and none depicted. At 50 percent, none depicted was on top again. Coed was the next highest at 41 percent. The female school selection was 7 percent and the male school selection was 2 percent.

Finally, architecture had six descriptors. Monuments, grandiose buildings, athletic stadiums, Quonset huts, athletic buildings and none depicted were the choices. None depicted was again on top at 57 percent. This was followed by grandiose buildings at 21

percent and athletic stadiums at 16 percent. Monuments came in at 11 percent and lastly, athletic buildings were represented 7 percent of the time. There were no depictions of Quonset huts.

Table 1

*Distribution of Institutional Traits (in percent rounded to the nearest whole number)*

<i>Trait/Descriptor</i> Institutional Type (n=44)	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Trait/Descriptor</i> Campus Location (n = 44)	<i>Percent</i>
Public	7	Dormitory	0
Private	45	Auditorium	0
Not specified	48	Cafeteria	0
		Classroom	9
Institutional Size (n= 44)		Not Specified	45
Small	34	Mixture	41
Large	21	Athletic Field	2
Not specified	45	Campus Grnds	2
		Student Gender Ratio (n = 44)	
Institution Location (n=44)		Male	2
Urban	9	Female	7
Rural	7	Coed	41
Suburban	30	Not Specified	50
Not Specified	55	Architecture (n = 49)	
Education Level (n = 44)		Monuments	11
Undergraduate	45	Grandiose Bldgs.	21
Graduate	2	Athletic Stadiums	16
Not Specified	52	Quonset Huts	0
		Athletic Bldgs.	7
		Not Specified	57

### Professor – Personal Traits

There are 12 variables under the heading of professor – personal traits. These variables include: professor race, age, gender, national origin, career stage, appearance, personality, role, quality of role, role focus, role focus if not a professor and professor's economic status. The criterion for each descriptor for each variable on the data collection instrument is described on pages 46 through 48 of this study.

The depiction of the professor's race and gender were nearly unanimous. In 43 films the professor was Caucasian. The 44<sup>th</sup> film depicted the professor by voice only. The gender of the professor was male in 95 percent of the films. The professor's age was also reasonably consistent. Here, the majority of the professor's are depicted in their forties at 41 percent. This is followed with the thirties at 34 percent. Next were the fifties 18 percent of the time. The very young professor in their twenties, as well as the older professor in their sixties, were each depicted 2 percent of the time. This data is coincident with the career stage where 66 percent of the professors are portrayed in the middle of their careers, while only 11 percent are portrayed in their early stages of their career or were not depicted at all. Only 2 percent of the portrayals were of retired professors and another 9 percent depicted the professor in the later stages of their career.

The national origin of the professor was virtually unanimous with 95 percent of the professors' native to the country where they were employed. The remaining 5 percent were not native to their place of employment.

The variable relating to the professor's appearance was distributed among neat, unkempt, professional attire, non-professional attire and a mixture. Of these, the category of professional attire was nearly unanimous at 91 percent. Another selection was neat

(but casual) at 5 percent and the only other category utilized was non-professional attire at 2 percent. The quality of the professor's role was strongly indicated toward the role being instrumental for the plot in 77 percent of the instances. The only other selection was the role being incidental to the plot at 23 percent. There were no portrayals of the professor that were superfluous to the plot.

The professor's personality was distributed among the choices of normal, eccentric and "nerd-like." The professor's personality was eccentric 57 percent of the time followed by normal 39 percent of the time. None of the professor's personalities portrayed could be described as nerd-like in their presentation.

The role focus if the professor was not a true professor was an open variable. There were eight occasions when the professor depicted was not a true professor. The largest category for the role focus when the portrayal was not of a professor was that of a con man. This occurred 57 percent of the time when the role focus was not a professor and 9 percent of the time overall. The second largest category was that of a bartender in 29 percent of the cases and 5 percent overall. The other choice for this variable was of a would-be murderer and a murderer pretending to be a professor. These selections occurred in only 2 percent of the choices overall.

Finally, the economic status of the professor was examined. The descriptors for this variable were wealthy, average, poor and not shown. The category of not shown was most frequently depicted at 57 percent. The professor was portrayed as poor in 32 percent of the cases. The professor was wealthy only 7 percent of the time and average 5 percent.

Table 2

*Distribution of Professor – Personal Traits (in Percent rounded to the nearest whole number)*

<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Professor Race (n = 43)		Career Stage (n = 44)	
Caucasian	98	Early	11
African-American	0	Middle	66
Asian	0	Late	9
Native-American	0	Retired	2
Hispanic	0	Not Specified	11
Professor Age (n = 43)		Professor Appearance (n = 43)	
20's	2	Neat	5
30's	34	Unkempt	0
40's	41	Professional Attire	91
50's	18	Non-Profession Attire	2
60's	2	Mixture	0
Professor Gender (n = 44)		Professor Personality (n = 42)	
Male	95	Normal	39
Female	5	Eccentric	57
		Nerd-like	0
Professor National Origin (n = 44)		Professor Role (n = 44)	
Native	95	One Dimensional	25
Foreign	5	Developed	75
		Quality of Role (n = 44)	
		Incidental	23
		Instrumental	77
		Superfluous	0



Table 2 (continued)

<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Role Focus (n = 44)		Professor Economic Status (n = 44)	
Professional Life	55	Wealthy	7
Non-Profession Life	14	Average	5
Family	0	Poor	32
Mixture	16	Not Specified	57
Not a Professor	16		
Role Focus if Not True Professor (n = 8)			
Con Man	9		
Bartender	5		
Would-be Murderer	2		
Murderer	2		

#### Professor – Professional Traits

There are 11 variables under the heading of professor – professional traits. These variables include course preparation, depiction of instructional content, the category of instructional content, student assessment and the type of assessment, research and publishing activities, professor/student interaction and its location, institutional or public service and the academic degree of the professor. The criterion for each descriptor for each variable on the data collection instrument is described on pages 48 through 49 of this study.

Course preparation proved to not be shown at all. Institutional or public service did not fair much better. In this category 91 percent of the portrayals did not show institutional or public service. Only 9 percent of the portrayals did show this service. Publishing activities proved to be nearly the same with no depiction in 84 percent of the films.

The portrayal of instructional content was heavily skewed toward not depicted. The majority of the time, 64 percent, it was not shown and 36 percent of the time it was shown. The instructional content portrayed was almost unanimously academic in nature at 81 percent. Career information was the instructional content in 6 percent of the cases and professional education was presented in 13 percent of the instances. The instructional content displayed in these films included music, English, human biology, psychology, chemistry and anthropology in order of frequency. The display of student assessment was substantially skewed toward no portrayal with 80 percent of the films failing to show student assessment. Only 20 percent of the films showed student assessment. Of this 20 percent portrayal of assessment, the portrayal was of verbal assessment 78 percent of the time and written assessment only 22 percent.

The display of professor student interaction followed a nearly identical distribution between being displayed and not being displayed. Professor-student interaction did not occur in 52 percent of the films. That is, there was a portrayal of professor student interaction in 48 percent of the films. The location of professor student interaction was heavily distributed toward the classroom with 62 percent of those interactions occurring in the classroom. There were 24 percent of these interactions occurring during a campus meeting and 14 percent of these meetings occurred socially.

Only 10 percent of the meetings were of a romantic nature and 5 percent of the meetings occurred at a sporting event.

The depiction of research activities by the professor was slightly skewed toward not being depicted. Research activities were not shown in 59 percent of the films studied. However, research activities were depicted in 41 percent of the movies. Surprisingly, 70 percent of the professors in these movies do not establish their degree by name, title or inference. While 18 percent of them do have a doctoral degree only 11 percent of the professors clearly establish holding a master's degree.

Table 3

*Distribution of Professor-Professional Traits (in Percent rounded to the nearest whole number)*

<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>	<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Course Preparation (n = 44)		Professor/Student Interaction (n = 44)	
Yes	0	Yes	48
No	100	No	52
Instructional Content (n = 44)		If Yes (n = 24)	
Yes	36	Classroom	62
No	64	Campus Meeting	24
If Yes (n = 16)		Social Meeting	14
Career	6	Romance	10
Academic	81	Sporting event	5
Professional	13	Institutional/Public Service (n = 44)	
Personal	0	Yes	9
Student Assessment (n = 44)		No	91
Yes	20	Professor Degree (n = 44)	
No	80	Doctorate	18
If Yes (n = 9)		Masters	11
Oral Assessment	78	Not Specified	70
Written Assessment	22		
Research Activities (n = 44)			
Yes	41		
No	59		
Publishing Activities (n = 44)			
Yes	16		
No	84		

### Film Traits

The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) established seven categories for classifying comedy films. Those categories are comedy, musical-comedy, fantasy comedy, drama-comedy, action-comedy and biography-comedy. These were the seven categories used to categorize the films in this study. Of the seven, the selections were overwhelmingly in the comedy category at 68 percent. Musical-comedy was second with 14 percent. Mystery-comedy and fantasy-comedy were equally represented at 5 percent. Drama-comedy was represented with 7 percent and action-comedy 2 percent. There were no entries in the biography-comedy category. The criterion for each descriptor for each variable on the data collection instrument is described in Appendix D of this study.

Table 4

*Distribution of Film Traits (in Percent rounded to the nearest whole number)*

<i>Trait/Descriptor</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Type of Comedy (n = 44)	
Comedy	68
Musical-Comedy	14
Mystery-Comedy	5
Fantasy-Comedy	5
Drama-Comedy	7
Action-Comedy	2
Biography-Comedy	0

## Summary

As previously stated, 44 films out of the 105 were selected to be included in this study. Those 44 films were selected on the basis of their availability to be viewed today. Searches were conducted for the 105 films identified as the sample in this study. The first search was to determine the specific films of the sample that could be rented for viewing. The second search was conducted to identify the particular films that would be available to be purchased for viewing. Two films needed to be substituted for the final study as compared to the initial list of study films. This change kept the original projection of sample films intact at 44 films to be viewed for the data collection. The 44 films selected represent 42 percent of the total number of films identified for this study. A data collection instrument was completed for each film during the viewing. The results were tabulated and descriptive statistics were applied to those results.

Under the heading of institutional traits there are seven variables. The variables of institution type (48%), size of the institution (45%), institution location (55%), education level (52%), campus location (45%), educational gender (50%) and architecture (57%) were all distributed as such that none depicted became the highest percentage in the distribution.

For professor – personal traits there are 12 variables. The professor's race was unanimous as Caucasian (98%, with one abstention). The gender was near unanimous with the professor being male 95 percent of the time. The professor's age (forties) and career stage (middle) were distributed with the highest percentage at 41 percent and 66 percent respectively. The professor wore professional attire 91 percent of the time and was also a native of his place of employment 95 percent of the time. The quality of the

role of the professor was instrumental to the plot 77 percent of the time. None of the professor's roles were superfluous to the plot. The professor's role was that of a developed character 75 percent of the time. The most common role focus of the professor was that of his professional life. The professional life of the professor was depicted in 55 percent of the films. The role focus of the professor when he was not a professor was that of a con man most commonly. This occurred in 9 percent of the films. The most common personality type for the professor was eccentric at 57 percent as was the lack of depiction of the professor's economic status.

In the category of professor – professional traits there are 11 variables. Course preparation was unanimously not shown in any of the films. Publishing activities were nearly unanimously not shown as well. It was not depicted in 84 percent of the films. Likewise, the instructional content was 81 percent academic subjects. However, instructional content was only depicted 36 percent of the time. The professorial role of institutional/public service was also not depicted 91 percent of the time. Not far removed from this was the lack of depiction of student assessment 80 percent of the time. However, when student assessment was shown it was 78 percent verbal assessment. Research activities of the professor are not shown in 59 percent of the movies. Professor/student interaction is only shown in 48 percent of the films. When there was professor/student interaction displayed in the films, 62 percent of the time that display occurred in the classroom. Lastly, the professor's degree was not included in the film 70 percent of the time. In 11 percent of the films the professor was characterized as holding a master's degree and 18 percent of the time the professor held a doctorate.

The film category distribution showed 68 percent of the movies classified as simply a comedy. Musical-comedy accounted for 14 percent and drama-comedy 7 percent. Both mystery-comedy and fantasy-comedy each came in at 5 percent and action-comedy accounted for 2 percent.

Table five below displays the variables under each heading: institutional traits, professor-personal traits, professor-professional traits and film traits. For each variable the descriptor with the highest percentage is listed along with that percentage.



*Table 5* *Summary Distribution of Data*  
*Institutional Traits*

*Variable with the Highest Percentage of Distribution per Variable and its %*

Institution type: none depicted	48%
Institution size: none depicted	45%
Institution location: none depicted	55%
Education level: none depicted	52%
Campus location: none depicted	45%
Educational Gender: none depicted	50%
Architecture: none depicted	57%

*Professor – Personal Traits*

Professor's Race: Caucasian	98%
Professor's Gender: male	95%
Professor's Age: forties	41%
Career Stage: middle	66%
Professor Origin: native	95%
Professor's Appearance: professional attire	91%
Professor's role: developed character	75%
Role focus: professional life	55%
Role focus if not a true professor: con man	9%
Quality of the Role: instrumental	77%
Professor's Personality: eccentric	57%
Professor's economic status: not depicted	57%

*Professor – Professional Traits*

Course Preparation: none depicted	100%
Publishing Activities: none depicted	84%
Institutional/Public Service: none depicted	91%
Research activities: none depicted	59%
Instruction depicted: none depicted	64%
Instructional Content: academic	81%
Student Assessment: none portrayed	80%
Type of assessment: verbal	78%
Professor/student interaction: None depicted	52%
Location of Professor/Student Interaction: classroom	62%
Professor's Academic Degree: none depicted	70%

*SUMMARY DISTRIBUTION OF DATA**Table 5 (Continued)**Film Traits*

Film Classification: comedy

68%

## Chapter V

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final chapter provides a review of the purpose and nature of this study. It will also provide a discussion on the findings for each of the subsidiary questions as well as the research question itself. Each of the subsidiary questions corresponds to a section of the data collection instrument: institutional traits, professor – personal traits, professor – professional traits and film traits. The last sections of this chapter include the studies conclusions, limitations, suggestions for further research and contributions to the literature.

#### Purpose and Nature of the Study

The purpose for this study was to analyze the American film comedies from the era 1925 through 1951 to determine how the image of the professor was being depicted. The image of the professor has been analyzed in many forms of media. Academic fiction, in particular, has seen a significant amount of analysis on this topic. In addition to academic fiction, the media that have been studied are cinema (but only in a general fashion), song lyrics, plays and, by extension, television. The negative depiction of the professor is mostly unanimous in this media and this negativity toward the professor possibly provides a ripple effect throughout the academy. However, there do not appear to be any studies that have investigated the specific depiction of the professor in cinema. Certainly, there have been no studies that have focused on the depiction of the professor in American comedies. The few film studies that have been completed have all been focused on college-life more generally, and have been qualitative in their nature.

Because this time period (1925 – 1951) contains so many college themed movies by so many prominent comedians and comediennes (see Appendix C) these films continue to exert an influence today and probably will for time immemorial. The prominent names of Hollywood's past seem to continuously create a new following of fans. As a result, the films that they created in years past are still being enjoyed today, as is their message and the images portrayed. With the advent of home video, the accessibility of these films has never been greater. Purchasing or renting a DVD is as simple as a mouse click today. These movies can be purchased, rented or even viewed on the home computer. In lieu of the home computer, the consumer can rent or purchase these movies at literally thousands of retail locations across America. Once in their possession, the consumer can watch the movie as many times as they like which will only add to the reinforcement of the films message. The DVD of today also frequently contains DVD extras that can only add to the films message and content.

How the professor has been depicted in these films will most definitely have a lasting impact due to the power, influence, access and durability of cinema. Our understanding of that depiction can only improve our understanding of the public perception of higher education.

Thus, this study intends to contribute the first research that specifically examines and quantifies the image of the professor as depicted in American film comedies during the period 1925 through 1951. It is hoped that this research will add to the scholarship that already exists on the image of the professor in other media. It is intended that the image of the professor in these films will be discussed in the context of the historical

knowledge of higher education in America during the same time period as the films were made and/or depict.

### Major Findings and Implications

This section will initially present the responses to the first four subsidiary questions that helped guide this investigation. Each of these four questions contributes toward answering the primary research question. Next, the research question, “In what manner are college professors portrayed in American film comedies during the period 1925 through 1951 and is there any aspect of the history of higher education in America that is the basis for that depiction?” will be responded to and analyzed. In fact, the response to the historical aspect of the research question, “is there any aspect of the history of higher education in any given time period that contributes to that depiction?” will be woven throughout the responses to the first four subsidiary questions as well as the research question itself.

#### *Subsidiary Questions:*

1. What institutional traits are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?

The institutional traits that were studied covered seven categories: type, size and location of the institution, the education level, student gender ratio, campus location depicted and the architecture portrayed.

The institutional traits information literally tells us nothing about the university depicted in these films. The Hollywood university simply does not exist in the vast majority of these movies. In all of the seven categories the top response was that there

was no depiction of the university. These responses were also in the majority, ranging from 45 percent to 57 percent. Although Hollywood is apparently compelled to make films regarding the professor as evidenced by the sheer volume of films in that genre for this study, it feels no obligation to depict the professor's workplace at all, let alone with accuracy.

It is interesting to note that the secondary distribution of data, although in the decided minority, depicts a small, private, suburban, undergraduate, coed university. This is a reasonably accurate portrayal because during the time period studied, approximately half of the colleges in America were private and 80% of the colleges were coeducational. However, it would have been more authentic to include a junior college or two since there were nearly 500 of them nationwide enrolling nearly 150,000 students by 1940 (Thelin, 2004). Another noteworthy item is that when a campus location was depicted, the films universally show more than one campus locale. The Hollywood campus depiction is a feast or famine situation. There does not appear to be any middle ground in Hollywood. The films either depict no aspect of a campus or campus life or an abundance of campus life, albeit in the minority of the films in this study.

The historical record of higher education in America contrasts sharply with the Hollywood version of the university. This period in higher education history was marked primarily by a huge philanthropic push across America. This burst of philanthropy blossomed in the late 1800's and continued unabated on into the depression era and throughout the 1930's. This generosity began with the major corporate barons of the era like Rockefeller and Carnegie and eventually filtered down to the local businessmen and even the man on Main Street. In 1937, *Life* magazine estimated the brick and mortar of

the American campus to be worth two billion dollars (Thelin, 2004). All were caught up in the push for mass higher education in America. Officially, the United States reached Mass higher education in 1937 when 15% of the age grade for college was enrolled in higher education (Trow, 1972). Yet despite college enrollments increasing from 250,000 in 1917 to 1.3 million by 1940, Hollywood made no effort to depict this extraordinary increase. There is no mention of enrollment numbers nor any depiction visually of large numbers of students on campus mostly because they chose not to portray the campus.

However, the bulk of the philanthropical bequests were directed toward erecting monuments. As *Life* magazine (as cited in Thelin, 2004) reported in 1937 philanthropic America "...vastly prefers to construct a building than endow a professor's chair" (p. 207). As a result, huge ornamental displays of grandeur went up on the American campus from coast to coast. Duke University became the beneficiary of medieval-revival spires throughout its campus as it transformed itself from little Trinity College. Louisiana State University (LSU) benefited from an Italian marble football stadium as well as an assortment of academic buildings made from the same source. The University of Southern California at Los Angeles (UCLA) even imported a huge boulder so it could have its own Founders Rock. Campus after campus received the funds to build academic buildings, libraries and athletic stadiums. Grandiose buildings complete with columns became more the norm than the exception (Thelin, 2004).

Another trend in this era was the increased interest in American collegiate sports. The America public became infatuated with collegiate sports ranging from basketball, track and field, crew, swimming and, most significantly, football. This was the time frame when the great Notre Dame and the University of Southern California rivalry

began. These events, and many like them, could draw as many as 100,000 paying customers into the newly built football stadiums. There were regional rivalries occurring across the country to the fans delight and the universities financial pleasure (Thelin, 2004).

As the interest in collegiate sports expanded, some coaches and athletic directors allowed excess to occur. To put it politely, they "...continually stretched the limits of acceptable practice" (Thelin, 2004, p. 209). These excesses led the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (CFAT) to investigate collegiate sports. Their investigation led to a report released in 1929 that essentially charged that college presidents had relinquished control of their sport programs to scurrilous coaches and sometimes local businessmen. The report's release received newspaper headlines across the country (Thelin, 2004).

Yet, Hollywood chose to show little or none of these trends. Only 11% show monuments and 21% show architecture that could be deemed grandiose. In the Hollywood version of the university the campus itself is not even part of the movie, let alone the grand architecture of the period. It is curious why Hollywood would choose to not show the magnificent architecture when it would be such a great visual display in essentially, a visual medium. Including this architecture would have been as simple as sending a second unit film team to a local college campus to film background footage, yet they made the decision to not do this relatively simple act. The one possible exception to this generalization can be found in two films of this sample. In *Horsefeathers* (Mankiewicz, 1932), the 1932 Marx Brothers vehicle, they do show a football stadium but all of the football sequences focus on the action on the field. Despite a lengthy



sequence of football action, there is no attention drawn to the architecture itself. Harold Lloyd is more to the point in the 1925 silent classic *The Freshman* (Lloyd, 1925). An early title card in the movie declares, “The opening of the fall term at Tate College – a large football stadium with a college attached.” Ironically, the films climatic football sequence was filmed at the Rose Bowl. The Rose Bowl is home to the UCLA football team and one of the beneficiaries of the philanthropic generosity of the early 1920’s (Rosebowl, America’s Stadium). However, here again the architecture is absent in favor of the action on the playing field. Although 16% of the films do show a stadium, there is no appreciable demonstration of their architecture.

The concept of less than pure collegiate sports does manifest itself in these films as well. Three of the films in this sample or 7%, depict unethical sportsmanship. In *Horsefeathers* (Mankiewicz, 1932) there is a sub theme of each team in a great rivalry trying to outsmart the other team through the usage of ringers. The ringers are portrayed as professional athletes of Irish descent who unethically participate in the amateur football game. In *Let’s Go Collegiate* (Parsons, 1941) the ringer is portrayed as a member of the rowing (crew) team. Finally, in *Here Come the Co-eds* (Grant, 1945), the ringers are a professional girl’s basketball team that is substituted in their entirety for the amateur athletes. The opposing team counters out of necessity with a single ringer of their own and eventually wins the contest.

It would appear that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching report of 1929 left an indelible impression in Hollywood. Note too, that the impression seems to vary among the sports. It is not confined to just one sport in these depictions but distributed among football, basketball and crew. This may also be indicative of the

continued popularity of collegiate sports of all types. Hollywood may have also been trying to send a message or acting as an agent of change. In each of these films the so-called good guys win the day even against the unethical conduct of the opposing team.

Although not a ringer situation, there is a similar portrayal in *It Happens Every Spring* (Perlberg, 1949). In this film the professor invents a substance that makes a baseball repel wood. The obvious implication is that the batter, using a wooden bat, would not be able to hit the ball. In essence, the professor is cheating. However, by the end of the film he has to set aside his cheating and win the big game with honest effort.

2. What personal traits of the professor are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?

The personal traits of the professor were examined in 12 categories. They include the professor's race, age, gender, national origin and career stage. In addition, data were collected on the professor's appearance, personality, film role, quality and focus of the film role, the focus of the film role when not portraying the professor and the economic status of the professor.

The image of the professor's personal traits depicted in American comedies during this time period is rather decisive. In almost every film the professor is depicted as a Caucasian male. He is most likely to be a native of the country he is employed in (95%) and to wear professional (suit and tie) attire (91%). Furthermore the Hollywood professor is in his forties (41%) and correspondingly in the middle of his career stage (66%). He is also most likely to have an eccentric personality (57%). Although at no point is the role of the professor in the films superfluous (0%), it is rather heavily weighted toward the

role being instrumental to the plot (77%). The role focus of the professor is mostly professionally oriented (55%) and is that of a developed character 75% of the time. The economic status of the professor is not shown 57% of the time. In 32% of the portrayals the professor is poor.

In sum, the image of the personal traits of the professor is rather conclusive. He is a native Caucasian male with an eccentric personality in the middle stage of his career while in his forties and wearing professional attire throughout the film. In addition, the quality of the professor role is in no doubt. He is instrumental to the plot of the movie the vast majority of the time. The majority of the time the role of the professor is that of a developed character in the film and focused on his professional life while omitting his financial position.

Although not expected, it is interesting to note that in eight films the title of the professor had nothing to do with higher education. In two instances the title was applied to a bartender that was particularly gifted in his ability to conjure up new alcoholic drinks. In another four instances the professor was the title used by a con man who was obsessed with imbibing alcoholic beverages. The common threads between these six depictions of the professor appear to be alcohol and shadiness. However, it is unclear what conclusions may be drawn from these depictions other than the obvious negative aspects. The term 'con man' stems from the fuller expression *confidence man*. The meaning implied here is that the flim-flam artist must gain the trust or confidence of the victim prior to relieving them of their money or possessions. That may be the explanation behind the four portrayals of the professor as con men. Perhaps the title of the professor is being used as a means of gaining the trust of the intended victim. In a twisted sense, it

is almost a compliment to the profession. That is, that the profession is held in high enough esteem to warrant mutating its meaning for illicit gain. However, on its face it does not seem complimentary for the distinguished position of the professor to be utilized in such a disparaging manner. Nor is it likely that the average viewer would see it for anything other than an uncomplimentary usage or even another anti-intellectualism slap at academia. The final two non-professor roles were of a murderer and a would-be murderer posing as professors. These obviously negative portrayals are akin to the negativity discovered in European films of professors as reported on page 40 of this study.

Verrone (1999) concluded that the personal characteristics of the professor of today need to be quantified. She stated that we know neither little about the personal characteristics of the professor nor why the professor chose to become a member of the academy. Unfortunately, we know even less of the professor from a bygone era. Thelin (2004) attempts to pinpoint some of the characteristics of the professor in his *A History of American Higher Education*. Thelin describes the professor of the 1930's as being akin to the priesthood. He was living a generally solitary existence in a rented apartment near campus. One who chose a life of books and scholarship over family mostly due to financial hardship. The professor of yore frequently did not have a salary that would accommodate supporting a family. The professor in this era was a male Caucasian who most likely sought the university life as a safe haven. This professor was a rather stern individual that relied heavily on straight lecture from old notes. He did not engage in classroom discussion and did not relate personal information in the classroom. He also

did not wait around after class for questions or discussion and did not hold office hours for that purpose either.

Veysey (1965) described the professor of the 1920's as an individual with a love of books as opposed to status. He claimed that the professor sought the university as a haven for he was a shy, temperamental and painfully sensitive man. The university often was sought out by these men because they had neither little regard for materialistic trappings nor the hustle and bustle of the business world that was necessary to acquire those items. Likewise, the professor was not of a mind for the monastery or priesthood. Therefore, the university served as a sort of compromise to their career options in a broad sense. The university represented a middle ground where the professor could have a significant career without the attendant stress that the business world seemed to require and without being quite as cloistered as the monastery.

Superficially at least, the professor of American comedy film from 1925 to 1951 fits the description of the historical professor. Both are native Caucasian males and both would wear professional attire. Obviously the age and career stage would vary, but he is as likely as not to be a man in his forties and the middle of his career in both realms. The low salary component also matches the historical record. The discrepancy occurs when we consider the professor's personality. The films depict him the majority of the time (57%) as an eccentric personality. One who has bouts of forgetfulness and awkward or unusual behavior. For instance, the professor in *Let's Go Collegiate* (Parsons, 1941) cannot find his eyeglasses when they are on top of his head. He also carries a frog around in a paper bag and stops in the middle of a lecture to ruminate about whether or not he has had his lunch that day. In *Blondie Goes to College* (Sparks, 1942) the English

professor's name is Mixwell and he literally speaks gibberish throughout a lengthy scene. Similarly, in *Girl O' My Dreams* (Lackey, 1934) the music teacher is named Professor E. Phlatt. In *Horsefeathers* (Mankiewicz, 1932), the biology professor lectures while wearing full traditional graduation gown and mortar board cap. In *Bathing Beauty* (Cummings, 1944) the biology professor is portrayed as an individual that barks to his dog when communicating with the animal. One has to wonder if this eccentric portrayal has its genesis in the Veysey description of the professor that he was not inclined for neither the priesthood nor the business world. Even if we allow that there could be one or two members of the professoriate that match these portrayals, it would hardly be correct to state that nearly 60 percent of the professorate acts in such an eccentric manner. This indeed, is a negative portrayal of the professor in nearly 60 percent of the films of this study.

3. What professional traits of the professor are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?

There were 11 categories of professional traits of the professor on which data were collected. These traits include course preparation, instructional content and type of content, student assessment and type of assessment, research, publishing, and institutional/public service activities, professor/student interaction as well as location of the interaction and the academic degree of the professor.

Like the results for institutional traits, there was little depicted of the professional role of the professor. Course preparation, publishing activities, institutional/public service and student assessment were almost unanimously not portrayed at all in these films. Research activities were only shown 41 percent of the time. This means that with the

exception of the portrayal of instruction (36%) and professor/student interaction (48%), none of the Finkelstein and Schuster (2006) attributes of the professors' teaching role are depicted in these films and even the just mentioned categories are in the minority of the portrayals. Finkelstein and Schuster (2006) differentiate those tasks into four categories: material preparation, presentation or delivery of the material, assessment of student learning and interaction with students about course content. Of all the categories utilized to assess the professional traits of the professor, all of them were virtually unanimously not portrayed in this sample of films! Apparently Hollywood was not interested in an accurate portrayal of the professor because none of the professor's work life categorized in this study was portrayed in a significant manner in this sample of movies.

However, the few times that there was professor/student interaction it occurred primarily (62%) in the classroom. The rest of the time it was at a social event, campus meeting, sporting event, a romantic encounter or at times, an overlap of these categories. Even though the professor/student interactions were depicted only 48 percent of the time, these interactions occurred in the classroom 62 percent of those times. This seems to simply be a convenient manner for Hollywood to show the interaction in a recognizable manner. Virtually everyone is familiar with a classroom environment and that is the likely rationale for this locale. Since the majority of movie going Americans would not have had a college education (Thelin, 2004), the producers most likely chose not to have the interaction occur in less recognizable locales like the professor's office or the student union.

Even though the depiction of instruction was not shown in 64 percent of the movies, the depiction of instruction was nearly always academic in nature. In 81 percent

of the films the instruction depicted had an academic content. The areas of academic content were music, English, human biology, psychology, chemistry and anthropology in order of frequency. The presentation of the academic material was entirely via lecture. This matched the historical record for the era. Thelin (2004), documents that the predominant form of instruction in this time period was indeed the lecture format. In fact, due to the large increases in enrollment, sometimes these lectures were overwhelming in their sheer size. Frequently, universities expanded lecture seats to accommodate their inflating enrollments. He recounts how lectures at Berkeley and the University of Wisconsin would sometimes exceed 800 students. This practice led to graduate students taking over small portions of the class to provide for manageable groups. These graduate students were known as section men.

One impetus behind the enrollment increases of the mid to late 1940's was Public Law 346, the Servicemen's Readjustment Act. This is more commonly known as the GI Bill. The U.S. government passed this legislation in 1944 in the hope that they would be able to ease the transition of the WWII veteran back into society. The law contained provisions for paying monthly stipends in addition to tuition to allow the veterans to avail themselves of educational pursuits upon their return. By 1950, more than two million veterans (many of which were female) had taken advantage of this opportunity. This was more than double the most optimistic projection of usage at the time (Thelin, 2004).

As a result, the American campus saw enrollment essentially double between 1943 and 1946. In fact, the entire decade showed impressive increases. In 1939 – 1940, there were about 1.5 million students enrolled nationwide. By 1950, that number had increased by 80 percent to 2.7 million students enrolled. These enrollments were so



overwhelming that the distinguishing architectural characteristic of the American campus at this time was no longer the magnificent monuments of philanthropy, but the temporary structure known as the Quonset hut. These structures were built to accommodate this huge influx of students (Thelin, 2004). It is odd that this sample of films contained 16 movies that were released post WWII, and yet none of them depict these enrollment increases, the Quonset huts or the GI on campus. Nor do they depict the influx of women students into academia via the GI Bill.

While it is apparently important for Hollywood to depict the image of the professor in film, it is not important to depict the academic accomplishment of the professor. In 70 percent of the instances, the professor's degree is not apparent by language, signage or inference. He is most often simply referred to as professor and office doors simply have the title professor. In only 18 percent of the films he was identified as holding a doctorate degree. It is unclear if Hollywood simply assumed that the public would attribute the doctorate to the professor or if perhaps, Hollywood itself was unclear of the professor's credentials. In either case, it contradicts the historical record. For this era, Thelin (2004) noted that the Ph.D. degree was the accepted credential of expertise for the professor in America in most disciplines.

Once again, the contrasts between Hollywood and the historical record could not be greater. Like the institutional traits depicted, Hollywood shows a decided lack of realism in portraying the professional aspects of the professor's work life. Very little of the complexity of the professor's work life are depicted beyond the staid and safe environs of the classroom. It is not that the portrayal is unrealistic, but rather that it is simply not depicted at all much like the Hollywood university campus.

4. What film traits are presented in American comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951?

The Internet Movie Data Base (IMDB) utilizes seven headings for categorizing comedy films. These same seven categories were utilized to categorize the film comedies of this study. Sixty-eight percent of the films are categorized as simply comedies. Musical-comedy accounted for 14 percent and drama-comedy another 7 percent. Fantasy-comedy and mystery-comedy each came in at 5 percent and the last 2 percent was action-comedy.

Film comedy has a rich history of its own in America. It has been a mainstay of film since its inception. In fact, Mack Sennett and his Keystone Studios were probably the first household names associated with film in this country. Film comedy has been a significant influence both within the movie industry and upon society in general. "When life goes sour, people want to laugh; and in good times they still expect their share of joy. It is not unusual therefore, that the most popular figures in all film history have been the great jesters" (Manchel, 1973, p.2).

In addition, we cannot forget the underlying motive behind a great deal of movie comedy and that is to foster change. Through various means the great comedians will place society's foibles in the spotlight in order to show us our strengths and weaknesses. The film comedian will frequently show us the void between what is and what can be in our society. He may do this with finger pointing, ridicule, exaggeration, irony, satire or any other of the weapons at his disposal, but ultimately the film comedian is asking for change. As professor Frank Manchel said in 1973, "Their aim, which has been the aim of

all great comedy since the beginning of time, is to criticize the world in the belief that things can be better. In short, film comedy is the cinema's most revolutionary weapon" (p.3).

The element of change being sought by these film makers is not distinctly clear in these films. However, three possibilities emerge from the totality of the movies in this study. The first revolves around a very common theme found in many of these films. That theme is the triumph of the little man from that of abject ridicule to the hero of the story in some manner. This thematic approach may be asking for greater tolerance in our society. By having the object of ridicule become the hero of the story the film makers may be pointing out to society that we tend to judge people too quickly and perhaps, harshly.

The second area involves the theme of the college coming perilously close to closing forever due to financial hardship. In Hollywood's version, there is usually some outlandish scheme that prevents the financial disaster at the last possible moment. This approach may be asking the American citizen and indeed, the American government, to be a greater contributor to higher education so that these situations do not arise in reality. Finally, the last element of change being requested may involve the image of the professor itself. It is entirely possible that the comedians in these films are ridiculing the professor in order to tell the academy that they need to change the public perception of the professor. The portrayal of the eccentric professor may be indicating to the academy that your image is truly this poor and it needs to be altered to foster greater respect for the professor within our society.

### *The Research Question*

In what manner are college professors portrayed in American film comedies during the period 1925 through 1951 and is there any aspect of the history of higher education in America that is the basis for that depiction?

The Hollywood professor in the American comedy made between 1925 and 1951 is a most interesting person on many levels. This study examined the professor in several aspects. The study examined the depiction of the professor's workplace as well as the personal and professional traits of the professor as portrayed in these movies. In addition, the study examined the film classification of the movies themselves.

Ultimately, this researcher found that the most fruitful area of the study was the personal characteristics of the professor. This was the area that provided the richest profile of the character portrayal of the professor. The professor in the films studied is portrayed as a Caucasian male. This Caucasian male is approximately 40 years old and in the middle of his career stage. He is also a native to the country of employment. His physical appearance is one of professionalism because he always wears professional attire, namely a suit and tie, at all occasions whether business or social. The description of the Hollywood professor up to this point matches fairly well against what is known about the real professor from this era. The quality of the professor role is instrumental for facilitating the plot development of each story. This seems to indicate a substantive role for the professor in the development of the film itself.

The unfortunate conclusion of this profile however is the negative portrayal of the professor's personality. In the vast majority of the movies studied he is portrayed as an

eccentric personality. The character of the professor is portrayed as forgetful, awkward and possessing unusual behavior. In sum, he is not a character that one would hold in high esteem, but rather a character that would unfortunately encourage ridicule. Truly, this depiction is one that fosters anti-intellectualism in the viewer.

In addition, this analysis showed that the Hollywood professor's work life is of little consequence. Virtually no aspect of the professor's work life is depicted in these movies. Indeed, no part of the Finkelstein/Shuster (2006) matrix for the teaching role of the professor is portrayed with any significance. The historical trinity of the professorate – teaching, research and service – are virtually not depicted at all. Although the portrayal of professor student interaction is in the minority, when it is depicted it shows the interaction occurring predominantly in the classroom. This appears to be Hollywood's lackluster version of demonstrating the professor's professional life. In fact, the Hollywood version of the professor is so lax that we do not even know the educational credentials of the professor in these films. Yet, historically we know that the professor generally held a Ph.D. in most disciplines.

The same can be said for the professor's place of employment. The Hollywood university simply does not exist. When you view these films you do not get any indication of the size, type or location of the university. Nor are you given any information about the student gender ratio taught at the institution. Furthermore, there are no scenes performed at recognizable locations on the college campus. In short, the films could have been filmed anywhere because there are simply no indications of the American university anywhere to be found. This seems oddly in contrast to the historical record for the American campus in this time period. The American campus was in the

midst of a literal monumental transformation that would have fit nicely into the visual medium of the movies.

It is difficult to determine a rationale for Hollywood's lack of portrayal of the university and the professor's work life. The dichotomy that is immediately apparent is that Hollywood felt a strong need to portray the professor as evidenced by the sheer number of professor films in this genre, but simultaneously chose to ignore the professor's place of employment and work life. The only area left for Hollywood to portray was the professor itself. So, by default we have a need to portray the professor, but oddly not the entire aspect of the professor.

The most disturbing aspect of this conclusion is that the image of the professor that Hollywood chose to depict is far from complimentary. The eccentric personality of the professor that is portrayed makes a significant impact upon the observer of these films. It seems as if Hollywood wanted to portray men of intellect but to simultaneously ridicule them. It would seem that the intellect of the professor is both admired and feared. Admired enough to be included in these portrayals but feared enough to bring about the ridicule. The ridicule is obviously rooted in anti-intellectualism. Unfortunately, these films not only demonstrate anti-intellectualism but they perpetuate it. In fact, as cinema is examined beyond the years of this study this researcher suspects that the eccentric portrayal will worsen significantly. The next decade after this study is the era when Hollywood created *The Absent-Minded Professor* (Walsh, 1961) and *The Nutty Professor* (Gluckman, 1963) to name just two glaring examples of professor ridicule and anti-intellectualism. In at least these two depictions, the professor portrayal is expanded to show the university and at least some aspects of the professor work life including the

classroom and research. Unfortunately, these depictions also expand the professor ridicule and anti-intellectualism to much greater levels. Sadder still, is the fact that both of these films were so successful that they have spawned their own franchises. Each has been redone on several occasions and in several different media and it continues to this day. *The Nutty Professor* is currently in production as both a stage musical and an animated film (retrieved from [www.imdb.com](http://www.imdb.com)). Not only do we still have an anti-intellectualism issue present in this country, but we have a public perception issue regarding at least the media image of the university professor, if not the professor himself.

## Conclusions

This study identifies several specific components to the image of the professor that are depicted in American comedies released between 1925 and 1951. This study analyzed data in four specific domains. These domains included: (a) institutional traits, (b) professor - personal traits, (c) professor – professional traits and (d) film traits. Ultimately, these traits were analyzed and combined into a composite of the image of the professor as portrayed in these movies.

The institutional analysis showed that the universities or colleges of the comedy movies of this era are not portrayed the majority of the time and are not historically accurate if they are portrayed. This conclusion is based upon:

1. The fact that the majority distribution of data under the institutional traits in all seven categories were for ‘not depicted.’
2. The “not depicted” selection was also in the majority with the frequency ranging between 45 percent and 57 percent of the data.
3. This era is noted for the huge philanthropic donations that resulted in buildings, monuments and athletic stadiums being built in exorbitant style on virtually every campus in America. Yet, little to none of these campus trademarks are displayed in the campus depicted by Hollywood.
4. This era was one of exorbitant enrollment growth as American higher education moved from elite to a mass system of higher education. This era also encompassed the GI Bill and its attendant enrollment increases as well as its architectural triumph, the Quonset hut. Yet, Hollywood chose to not depict any of these notable events in the films of this sample even though 16 of the films were from the post WWII era. Nor does



Hollywood choose to note the beginning of the women's movement into higher education through their participation in the GI Bill. Since the films of this sample were comedies it would seem obvious for Hollywood to utilize the potential awkwardness of having large numbers of women on campus for the first time. Yet, they chose to ignore this scenario in this sample of films.

The analysis of the professor's professional characteristics showed that the image depicted of the professor in the comedy films of this era essentially had no work life. There is virtually no depiction of the classic trinity of professorial life – teaching, research and service. In addition, the other attributes of the professor's work day like office work, office hours, and interaction with colleagues are not portrayed either. This conclusion is based upon:

1. The fact that the majority distribution of the data under the work attributes of the professor in all seven work related categories were for "not depicted."
2. The "not depicted" selection was also in the majority with the frequency ranging between 52 percent and 100 percent of the data.
3. None of the characteristics of the Finkelstein/Shuster (2006) matrix describing the teaching aspects of the professor were shown even half the time in this sample of the movies and once, they were unanimously absent with yet another nearly unanimously absent.
4. Not even the academic credentials of the professor are depicted or depicted with historical accuracy. In 70 percent of the films in this sample there is no indication either verbally or non-verbally about the professor's academic credentials

although it is known that for this era the Ph.D. was the credential of expertise for the professor in most academic disciplines.

The analysis of the professor's personal traits showed that the image of the professor depicted in the comedy films of this era was a negative portrayal. This conclusion is based upon:

1. The title professor is not always used to indicate a position in higher education. This sample of films showed the title used twice by a bartender and twice by a murderer or would-be murderer posing as a professor. In another four instances, the title of professor was used by an alcoholic con man. These combined to represent 18 percent of the film depictions studied.

2. The majority (57%) of the films in this sample contained a portrayal of the professor that was described as eccentric. The personality of the professor depicted in these films showed an image of an absent minded individual with peculiar habits, mannerisms, names and on at least one occasion, dress.

3. Several films in this study utilized quotations that were quite negative toward the professor and higher education. In *College* (Schenck, 1927) a title card reads: "Your speech was ridiculous. Anyone prefers an athlete to a weak-kneed teachers pet." This occurs after the class valedictorian makes a speech in favor of academics. Later on the dean says "A boy like you can make this athlete infested college a seat of learning once more." In the first version of *Good News* (Grinde, 1930) a student asks "Why don't they teach us something here that will be of some good." In *Good News* (Edens, 1947) the coach tells a student, "psychology is black magic – leave it alone." In *The Bishop's Wife*

(Goldwyn, 1948) we hear “you know so much it makes me feel uncomfortable.” In *Bedtime for Bonzo* (Kraike, 1951) an actor states “I thought all professors were old men with Van Dyke beards” as she meets the young professor for the first time. Finally, in *People Will Talk* (Zannuck, 1951), “You are a professor and it’s hard to make you understand anything that ain’t in a book. Well most of what goes on in the world ain’t in a book.” Oddly, the professor offers no resistance to this comment. Note that these quotes are representative of each decade of the study. The anti-intellectualism is evenly distributed throughout the study time frame.

4. The image projected of the professor’s personality is such that it would both invite ridicule and foster anti-intellectualism.

### Implications for Practice

The findings and conclusions of this study suggest the following implications for practice:

1. This study is the first known research to examine the portrayal of the professor specifically in comedy films during the period 1925 through 1951. It is also the first study to quantify that role so that it can be examined and understood in clear, measurable terms. Hopefully, it will prove to be a springboard for further research in this area of study.
2. Anti-intellectualism has been identified and quantified in American comedic cinema portraying the professor in the period of 1925 through 1951.
3. The depiction of the American professor in American comedic film has been shown to be a negative portrayal. This negativity has at its roots in anti-intellectualism. The American Association for University Professors (AAUP) or a similar professional organization should create a watchdog committee to help protect the image of the professor in cinema as well as other forms of media. This professional organization should put Hollywood on notice, like the Mexican government did in 1919, that they will no longer tolerate the professor being depicted as an object of ridicule.
4. The AAUP or a similar professional organization should take a proactive role in working with Hollywood to develop a screen persona of the professor that is respectable and in accordance with the esteem earned by such a learned profession. Over a period of time the public perception of the professor can be greatly improved through the repeated enhancement of the professor portrayal and perhaps, we might even see a decline in anti-intellectualism in the United States as a result

### Suggestions for Further Research

The findings and conclusions of this study suggest the following areas for further research activity:

1. A similar study is recommended to be undertaken to study the comedy films from 1952 through 1979. This study would mirror the number of years in this study and should be conducted in a similar fashion as this study so that the two results can be compared and contrasted. This particular era should prove to be an interesting time frame to study both the professor portrayal and anti-intellectualism. This era includes the numerous Disney depictions of the absent-minded professor, the string of Medford College sequels it spawned and the seminal Jerry Lewis film, *The Nutty Professor* (Gluckman, 1963).

However, when the study of this era is conducted it should find a manner in which to capture supplemental information from any ancillary professors portrayed in the movies. In conducting this research, the researcher found that occasionally ancillary professors were portrayed but there was no mechanism to capture this data. In addition, expanding the study to this era would eliminate one limitation of this study as noted in chapter three.

2. A similar study is recommended to be undertaken to study comedy films from 1980 to 2009. This study would also mirror the number of years of this study and should be conducted in a similar fashion as this study so that its results can be compared and contrasted to the previous two studies from different time periods. It will be interesting to note if the themes of anti-intellectualism and eccentric professors as well as the other conclusions of this study transcend the different time periods.

Naturally, the caveat mentioned above would apply here as well. Namely, that this study should capture any ancillary professors portrayed. In addition, expanding the study to this era also would eliminate one limitation of this study as noted in chapter three.

3. Parallel studies are recommended to be conducted in different film genres such as drama. These studies would demonstrate if the conclusions of this study transcend over genres or if they are restricted to the comedy genre. It is quite possible that the portrayals of professors in drama will be quite different than the comedic portrayal. A study in this area would also eliminate another limitation to this study as noted in chapter III.

4. Parallel studies are recommended to be conducted specifically on television depictions of the professor. These studies should be distributed along similar time frames and genres so that accurate comparisons can be made to the film studies. The study of television would complete the media analysis of the image of the professor.

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## APPENDIX A

List of Prominent Comedians/Actors Appearing in College Themed Movies From 1925 - 1951

**LIST OF PROMINENT COMEDIANS/ACTORS APPEARING IN COLLEGE THEMED MOVIES FROM 1925 – 1951**

June Allyson	Leon Errol	Virginia Mayo
Don Ameche	W.C. Fields – 3	Ray Milland - 3
Bud Abbott & Lou Costello - 5	Henry Fonda	David Niven
Jim Backus	Cary Grant – 4	Jack Oakie - 4
John Barrymore	Katherine Hepburn	Donald O'Connor
William Bendix – 2	Bob Hope	Maureen O'Hara
Jack Benny	Edward Everett Horton – 3	Ronald Reagan - 2
Milton Berle	Rock Hudson	Ginger Rogers
Joe Besser	Van Johnson – 2	Red Skelton
Bing Crosby	Boris Karloff	Walter Slezak
Ronald Colman	Danny Kaye	Barbara Stanwyck
Eddie Bracken	Buster Keaton	Jimmy Stewart
Walter Brennan – 2	Edgar Kennedy	Shirley Temple
George Burns & Gracie Allen – 3	Harry Langdon	Three Stooges - 2
Lon Chaney, jr. – 2	Stan Laurel & Oliver Hardy – 3	Rudy Vallee - 2
Charles Coburn – 4	Sheldon Leonard	Clifton Webb
Claudette Colbert	Peter Lorre	Wheeler & Woolsey
Jackie Coogan – 2	Jackie Cooper	Esther Williams
Gary Cooper	Harold Lloyd	Natalie Wood
Joan Crawford	Myrna Loy	Monty Woolley - 2
Hume Cronyn	Bela Lugosi – 2	Loretta Young - 2
Robert Cummings	Fred MacMurray -2	Robert Young - 2
Brian Donleavy	Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis	
Jimmy Durante - 2	Marx Brothers	

## APPENDIX B

**American Comedic Films Released Between 1925 – 1951 That Include Portrayals of Professors**

**American Comedic Films Released Between 1925 – 1951 That Include  
Portrayals of Professors**

**Legend: \* films available for viewing on VHS or DVD formats**

Listed by title followed by release date in reverse order

That's My Boy – 1951\*

Three Guys Named Mike – 1951\*

People Will Talk – 1951 \*

Good-bye, Mr. Fancy – 1951

Bedtime for Bonzo – 1951 \*

The Petty Girl – 1950

Peggy – 1950

Yes Sir, That's My Baby – 1949

Mother is a Freshman – 1949

Father was a Fullback – 1949 \*

Mr. Belvidere Goes to College - 1949

Joe Palooka in the Counterpunch – 1949

It Happens Every Spring – 1949 \*

Family Honeymoon – 1949

A Song is Born – 1948 \*

Abbott & Costello Meet Frankenstein – 1948 \*



The Return of October – 1948 \*

Mexican Hayride – 1948 \*

Campus Honeymoon – 1948

The Bishop's Wife – 1948 \*

The Trouble with Women – 1947

Good News – 1947 \*

Sarge Goes to College – 1947

Sin of Harold Diddlebock – 1947 \*

Mad Wednesday – 1947 \*

Kilroy Was Here – 1947

Little Giant – 1946 \*

She Wrote the Book – 1946

Down Missouri Way – 1946

Scared Stiff – 1945 \*

Eadie was a Lady – 1945

Here Come the Co-eds – 1945 \*

Bathing Beauty – 1944 \*

Young Ideas – 1943

The Male Animal – 1942

Sweater Girl – 1942

The Talk of the Town – 1942 \*

The McGuerins from Brooklyn – 1942

Who Done it? – 1942 \*

Blondie Goes to College – 1942 \*

Ball of Fire – 1942 \*

Sis Hopkins – 1941

Lets Go Collegiate – 1941 \*

Our Wife – 1941

Married Bachelor – 1941

Rise and Shine – 1941

Harvard, Here I come – 1941

The Feminine Touch – 1941

The Body Disappears – 1941

You'll Find Out – 1940 \*

Those Were the Days – 1940

The Quarterback – 1940

A Chump at Oxford – 1940 \*

Slightly Tempted – 1940

Scatterbrain – 1940

Saps At Sea – 1940 \*

French without Tears – 1940

Good Girls Go to Paris – 1939

Dancing Co-ed – 1939

Naughty But Nice - 1939

All Women Have Secrets – 1939

Zenobia – 1939 \*

Pygmalion – 1938 \*

Bringing Up Baby – 1938 \*

Vivacious Lady – 1938 \*

Spring Madness – 1938

Swing That Cheer – 1938

College Swing – 1938 \*

Mr. Doodle Kicks Off – 1938

Start Cheering - 1938

Professor Beware – 1938

Holiday -1938 \*

Live, Love and Learn – 1937

College Holiday – 1936

We Went to College – 1936

Mummy's Boys – 1936

Here Comes Trouble – 1936

Seven Keys to Baldpate – 1935

Make a Million – 1935 \*

Poppy – 1935 \*

The Live Wire – 1935 \*

College Scandal – 1935

Bachelor of Arts – 1934

Girl o' My Dreams – 1934 \*

Topaze - 1933

In The Money – 1933

College Humor – 1933

International House – 1933 \*

Meet the Baron – 1933 \*

Speak Easily – 1932 \*

Horse Feathers – 1932 \*

Good News – 1930 \*

The Wild Party – 1929

The Time, the Place, and the Girl – 1929

Campus Knights – 1929

Hold 'em Yale – 1928

The Olympic Hero – 1928

The College Widow – 1927

The Poor Nut – 1927

Swim Girl, Swim – 1927

College – 1927 \*

College Days - 1926

I'll Show You the Town – 1925

The Freshman – 1925 \*

Sally of the Sawdust – 1925 \*

**APPENDIX C**  
**Data Collection Instrument**

Film: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**INSTITUTIONAL TRAITS**

1. Type of institution:      public      private      none
2. Size of institution:      small      large      none
3. Institution location:      urban      rural      suburban      not shown
4. Education level:      undergraduate      graduate      N/A
5. Campus location:      dormitory      auditorium      cafeteria      classroom      none  
                                  mixture      athletic field      campus grounds
6. Student gender ratio:      male      female      coed      N/A
7. Architecture:      monuments      grandiose buildings      athletic stadiums  
                                  Quonset huts      athletic buildings      none

**PROFESSOR – PERSONAL TRAITS**

8. Professor race:      Caucasian      African-American      Asian      Native American  
                                  Hispanic





18. Professor economic status:      wealthy      average      poor      not shown

### **PROFESSOR – PROFESSIONAL TRAITS**

19. Course preparation:      yes      no

20. Instructional content:      yes      no

20a. If yes:      career      academic      professional      personal

21. Student assessment:      yes      no

21a. If yes:      oral      written

22. Research activities:      yes      no

23. Publishing activities:      yes      no

24. Professor/student interaction:      yes      no

24a. If yes:      classroom      campus meeting      social meeting      romance  
sporting event

25. Institutional/public service:                      yes                      no

26. Professor degree:                      doctorate                      master's                      N/A

### **FILM TRAITS**

27. Type of comedy:    comedy    musical-comedy    mystery-comedy    fantasy-comedy  
                                 drama-comedy                      action-comedy                      biography-comedy

Comments:

## APPENDIX D

### Definitions of Film Traits as Defined by the Internet Movie Database

Definitions of Film Traits as Defined by the Internet Movie Database

**COMEDY:** Virtually all scenes should contain characters participating in humorous or comedic experiences. The comedy can be exclusively for the viewer, at the expense of the characters in the title, or be shared with them. There are various types of comedy, some are: spoof, parody, satire, black-comedy, slapstick and screwball. Please submit any qualifying keywords such as those to better describe the humor. **Note:** if most scenes are not compliant with comedic themes, then use the 'comedy' keyword (or other variations) instead, and do not include the title in this genre.

**MUSICAL-COMEDY:** A comedic film that should contain several scenes of characters bursting into song aimed at the viewer (this excludes songs performed for the enjoyment of other characters that may be viewing) while the rest of the time, usually but not exclusively, portraying a narrative that alludes to another Genre. **Note:** not to be added for titles that are simply music related or has music performances in them; e.g., pop concerts do not apply. Also, classical opera, since it is entirely musical, does not apply and should instead be treated as Music.

**MYSTERY-COMEDY:** A comedy film that should contain numerous inter-related scenes of one or more characters endeavoring to widen their knowledge of anything pertaining to themselves or others. **Note:** Usually, but not always associated with Crime.

**ACTION-COMEDY:** A comedy film that should contain numerous scenes where action is spectacular and usually destructive. **Note:** if a movie contains just one action scene (even if prolonged, e.g., airplane-accident) it does not qualify.

**FANTASY-COMEDY:** A comedy film that should contain numerous consecutive scenes of characters portrayed to affect a magical and/or mystical narrative throughout the title. **Note:** not to be confused with Sci-Fi that is not usually based in magic or mysticism.

**DRAMA-COMEDY:** A comedy film that should contain numerous consecutive scenes of characters portrayed to affect a serious narrative throughout the title. This can be exaggerated upon to produce melodrama. Please submit any such keywords.

**BIOGRAPHY-COMEDY:** A comedy film where the primary focus is on the depiction of activities and personality of a real person or persons, for some or all of their lifetime. Events in their life may be reenacted, or described in a documentary style. If re-enacted, they should generally follow reasonably close to the factual record, within the limitations of dramatic necessity. A real person in a fictional setting would not qualify a production for this genre. If the focus is primarily on events, rather than a person, use History instead.

([www.us.imdb.com](http://www.us.imdb.com))

